THE FAIRY LATCHKEY

M. HORSFALL

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THE FAIRY LATCHKEY

" He sat down under the thorn-tree to eat his supper."

THE
FAIRY LATCHKEY

BY

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Which introduces the Heroine, and Others	1
II.	Which introduces the Heroine's Godmother	11
III.	Which tells of a Key-hole in a Wall	17
IV.	Which introduces Sweet William	22
V.	In which the Heroine distinguishes Herself	32
VI.	In which the Heroine takes Advice	48
VII.	In which Master Mustardseed tells his story	60
VIII.	In which the Heroine makes the first use of her Latchkey	87
IX.	In which Sweet William tells a Story	92
X.	In which the Heroine has a Birthday	103
XI.	In which the Heroine is given a Letter of Introduction	108
XII.	In which the Heroine presents her Letter of Introduction	113
XIII.	In which great Good Fortune befalls the Heroine	125

CHAP. PAGE

XIV. In which the Merman tells his Story 130

XV. In which the Twin Sisters tell a Story between Them 148

XVI. In which the Heroine hears some startling News 163

XVII. In which Sweet William tells another Story 168

XVIII. Of which the Scene is laid in a Sick-Room 180

XIX. In which Queen Mab tells her Story 185

XX. In which the Heroine makes Friends with a Spirit 202

XXI. In which the White Létiche tells her Story 206

XXII. Which heralds a Change . . . 222

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"He sat down under the Thorn-Tree to eat his Supper" . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"'If you could let me have the Right Time, I should be Obliged to you'" . . 22

"Presently an Elf came past her, Riding on a Lizard" 96

"There, sure enough, . . . sat the Old Merman, gazing out to Sea" . . 126

"Kissed it, so that it might be able to Live under the Water" 152

"The Fairies had already begun to Assemble" . 198

"By her Bedside there stood a Small Figure" . 202

THE FAIRY LATCHKEY

CHAPTER I

WHICH INTRODUCES THE HEROINE, AND OTHERS

THERE was nothing at all remarkable about her, excepting her name, which was Philomène Isolde, and the fact that a knot of green ribbon had been sewn upon her christening dress; but the dress had long since lain folded in a drawer, and her father as often as not called her "Little Miss Muffet," because she was very fond of curds and whey, and very much afraid of spiders. When he did call her "Philomène," it meant that he was too busy to have her in the room with him. Unlike most people, she was satisfied with her own name, indeed she was proud of it; for Daddy had told her that Philomène meant "beloved," and as for Isolde, that was Godmother's own name. "And Isolde," said Godmother, "was a real Princess."

"I wish I were a real Princess," said Philo-

mène, and waited for Nurse to add, "If wishes were horses, Miss, beggars might ride," which she forthwith did.

Philomène was not a pretty child, but neither was she exactly plain, for she had small hands and feet, and a trim little figure, hazel eyes and plenty of soft mouse-coloured hair. And if there was nothing unusual about her appearance, there was certainly nothing unusual about her home, for she lived in a commonplace suburb of London, in a commonplace villa called Sideview. The house undoubtedly had two sides, but scarcely any view, unless the strip of back-garden counted as such. The drawing-room and dining-room opened out of a narrow hall, and both had about them the chill and mustiness of disuse, for since the death of Philomène's mother the drawing-room had seen no more parties, and her father, who was a hard-working doctor, as often as not snatched his hurried meals in the study, rather than in the dining-room. Philomène's own bedroom and schoolroom, on the upper landing, were large airy rooms for the size of the house.

At the foot of her bed stood a screen, upon which Froggy went a-wooing, and Little Red Ridinghood carried her covered basket through

the wood, and on the wall opposite hung a picture of a young shepherdess, clasping her crook, and kneeling in the shade of a spreading oak-tree. As there was no flock in sight, Philomène at first supposed her to be Bo-peep before her sheep came home, but Godmother had told her that it was Joan, the Maid of Orleans, who died for love of France and of the truth ; and from that time forward, on winter evenings when the salamanders began their torch-light revels on the hearth, Philomène would lie in bed and watch the ruddy reflection brighten and broaden among the branches of the oak, wrapping the frail young figure in a winding-sheet of flame, and placing the hard-won wreath of martyrdom upon her hair.

Over the mantelpiece in the schoolroom next door, hung another picture, one which had belonged to Philomène's mother. There was a road white with dust in the foreground, disappearing amidst a clump of trees, above which floated a wreath of blue smoke. Down to the road there sloped a bank of grass, and here sat a woman with a child in her lap, while a bird on the wing paused to peck from an ear of corn which the baby held in his hand. Beside the two an old man with kind eyes and

work-worn hands was unsaddling a small grey donkey, and a little further down the road stood a ruined shrine with a broken idol. Philomène liked the donkey with its long ears and sad eyes, and felt grateful to the old man for allowing it to nibble the grass at will.

It was in the schoolroom that Philomène kept her toys. There was the dolls' house and the dolls' kitchen, and the musical box, and the paint-box with its palettes and saucers and brushes. Last, but by no means least, came the book-shelf. It held all Mrs Ewing's stories, and all Mrs Molesworth's, Grimm, and Hans Andersen, and many more besides. Philomène used to act all the stories out of these books, but it is dull work to be both players and audience yourself, and it needs an imagination bordering on genius to ride alone upon a bed, and persuade your heart of hearts that it is Pegasus, the wonderful winged horse.

"And nothing ever happens to me," mused Philomène, "as it happens to people in books. I do not live in a chateau with a terrace and a raven, like Jeanne in 'The Tapestry-Room,' and when I play with the reels in Nurse's work-box they do not behave in the least like

Louisa's reels in 'Tell Me a Story.' I suppose it is because I am just ordinary."

It was a depressing thought, but facts could not be shelved. Philomène's cuckoo clock certainly acted very differently from Griselda's. So far from inviting her to climb up by the two long dangling chains, and take a seat opposite to him on a red velvet arm-chair, this disobliging bird uttered his "cuckoos" in a hasty, perfunctory manner, and then shut to the door of his house with a snap, as who should say, "That's over till next time."

In the schoolroom window hung a cage with a canary in it; he was of a bright yellow, all but his head, which was green, and Philomène had christened him Master Mustardseed, after one of the fairy pages in "Midsummer Night's Dream." Now this canary had something of a history. To begin with, he had had a predecessor, a canary that had been yellow all over, and so tame that he would perch upon Philomène's needle when she sewed, or upon her book when she read. Then one day the old maidservant, Lilian Augusta, had left the schoolroom window open and the cage-door ajar, and the canary flew out, never to return, and there was lamentation at Sideview. But

a few days later a strange thing happened. Through the open window, into the empty cage, flew another canary, this time with a little head as green and velvety as moss; Master Mustardseed, in short, who had remained with his new mistress ever since.

Besides her canary, Philomène had another pet, a white cat called Queen Mab, with paws as soft as pussy-willow and a footfall as light as any snowflake. Now this was how Queen Mab had first come to Sideview:—It was Christmas Eve, and Philomène stood at the dining-room window, listening to the waits, who were singing a Christmas carol:

"He lies 'mid the beasts of the stall,
Who is Maker and Lord of us all.
The winter wind blows cold and dreary;
See, he weeps, the world is weary,
Lord, have pity and mercy on me.
Come, come, come to the manger,
Kneel ye now to the new-born King;
Sing, sing, chorus of angels,
Stars of the morning, o'er Bethlehem sing!"

After that they moved on to the next house, and began the second verse.

"He leaves all his glory behind,
To be born and to die for mankind;

'Midst grateful beasts his cradle chooses,
Thankless man his love refuses.
Lord, have pity and mercy on me."

It was bitterly cold. Philomène closed the window, and as she did so a mew caught her attention. In another moment she had the hall-door open, and a gust of icy air met her, as though the very wind were trying to force its way into the house for shelter. Upon the doorstep sat a white kitten, draggled and shivering. Philomène picked it up at once, shut the door, and ran upstairs to the school-room, all in a flutter of pity and excitement. Nurse looked up from her sewing, and stared at her aghast.

"Well, Miss Philomène," she exclaimed at length, "I wonder what you will be up to next? Put that dirty little cat down this minute."

Philomène obeyed. "I wanted it to have some of the milk that was left over from supper," she protested timidly.

"And so it may," retorted Nurse, whose bark was worse than her bite, "so long as you don't go on holding it against your dress."

So Philomène took a saucer, and busied herself

with the kitten on the hearthrug. This was a bearskin, and had figured many a time in solitary games of Beauty and the Beast, for it had served as the hero's costume till he finally became a prince and discarded it, when Philomène, whose housewifely little soul disliked waste, had made the princess suggest that it should be lined with red flannel, and turned into a useful rug for the throne-room. The kitten lapped up the milk eagerly, and settled itself comfortably in front of the fire.

"And now you had better put it back where it came from, Miss," said Nurse.

"The saucer?" inquired Philomène blankly.

"No, child, the cat."

"But it came from the doorstep!" exclaimed Philomène, and seeing no relenting in Nurse's face, she burst into tears. At this moment her father came into the room.

"What? Tears, little maid?" he called out in surprise.

"Oh, Daddy, it's so cold outside, and it hasn't done anybody any harm, and it won't have any Christmas, and perhaps it's one of the 'grateful beasts' in the carol," sobbed Philomène.

"It certainly seemed grateful enough for the milk," said Nurse, who had not listened to the waits, and was of a literal turn of mind, "but I don't much fancy a stray cat in the kitchen all the same."

The doctor sat down in the red-cushioned rocking-chair, and took his child on his knee. He was a tall, well-made man with dark hair, keen eyes, and a somewhat abrupt manner, but he was never anything but gentle with his little daughter, and Philomène's sobs subsided as he stroked her hair and patted her cheek.

"Look here, little Miss Muffet," he said, "I will tell you what we will do. We will ask Nurse to let us keep the pussy over-night, and later on we will advertise in the newspaper, just as we did for Master Mustardseed, and if it doesn't seem to belong to anyone or to come from anywhere in particular, you shall have it for your own, and Nurse won't mind it if it catches the mice in the scullery, will she?"

Philomène's face cleared, and she looked beseechingly at Nurse. "You are master in this house, sir," admitted Nurse, "and it seems useless to fight against this love of dumb things. Cats especially do seem to run in families."

So the white kitten stayed, and grew into a white cat, glossy and well-liking, that followed Philomène about the house "like a dog," said the people who had never taken the trouble to befriend a cat.

CHAPTER II

WHICH INTRODUCES THE HEROINE'S GODMOTHER

If Philomène had not actually a fairy godmother, she had at least the nearest possible approach to one. To begin with, Godmother was beautiful. She had the red hair that artists love, a wild-rose complexion, and a gentle, even voice, which never scolded and never sneered; she had cool white hands with twinkling rings, and her dresses made a stately silken frou-frou on the stairs, bringing with them a faint fragrance of lavender and old-world pot-pourri.

She had a dear little country house called the Cushats, which stood among pinewoods where pigeons cooed to each other all day long, and the sea was not far off. Here the summer holidays were spent by Philomène, "little cushat" as Godmother called her at times, for, as the Danish proverb says, "a dear child has many names." She would sit by the hour

in the oak-panelled drawing-room, strumming on the quaint old spinet, or in the window-seat reading, while the bees murmured perpetually in the blossoming lime-tree outside. The garden was full of what are usually called old-fashioned flowers, though for my own part I should be slow to connect anything quite so tiresome as fashion, with anything quite so sweet as flowers. There the snowdrops came at Candlemas, and the daffodils on Lady Day, and there was a whole big hedge of the rosemary that Shakespeare loved.

Besides the Cushats, Godmother had a house in London, where there were broad flights of stairs with shallow steps, and vistas of reception rooms with polished floors and beautiful pictures and cabinets filled with eastern curios. Godmother's own boudoir was a remote hushed corner, where in midwinter forced lilac drugged the air with subtle sweetness.

It was here that Philomène often took tea with her, and when full justice had been done to the toast and cakes, Isolde would take her seat in a low chair before the fire, and Philomène, curling herself up on the hearth-rug, much as Queen Mab might have done had she

been invited, would lay her clasped hands in her godmother's lap, and begin to "want to know."

"Godmother," she had said on one of these occasions, "I want to know if it is cruel to keep caged birds. Do you remember when you took me to church with you a few Sundays ago, and they went round singing the Litany? Well, just as the choir-men passed me they were saying, 'and to show thy pity upon all prisoners and captives,' and I thought at once of Master Mustardseed."

"But Master Mustardseed came to you of his own accord," replied Godmother in her kind, low voice, "and I think a canary might find it very difficult to fend for himself if you set him free in England. All the same, when you are grown up, you need never keep any caged birds if you do not want to."

"Well then, you know the picture in the schoolroom with the baby in it, and the bird pecking at the ear of corn," continued Philomène. "I had just made up such a nice story about it all, when Miss Mills told me that it was a 'Flight into Egypt,' and that I ought not to make a play of it. But how was I to know? They hadn't any halos. And, O

Godmother, I had just planned that the ugly idol had enchanted a prince and princess and had turned them into the donkey and the bird, and that the grass and the corn they were eating would turn them back again. Then I asked Miss Mills what the idol and the bird really did mean, but she could not tell me. She only said she supposed it must be some silly legend. Whenever Miss Mills does not know the answer to what I ask her, she says it must be a silly legend. What do they mean, Godmother ? "

" The picture is a modern one," said Isolde, " that is why the Holy Family are painted without halos, and Miss Mills was quite right about its being a legend. Your mother once told me all the different things that the painter had tried to express in his picture. The smoke above the trees is supposed to come from an inn, where the inn-keeper and his wife have just refused to give shelter to the travellers, and it is said that their children's children are the gipsies, who have now no settled home or shelter of their own. Then there is another story that when the idols of Egypt recognized the true God, they fell down and were broken. The bird with the outspread wings is the human

soul, and the Lord is feeding it with the Bread of Life."

"Still you don't think the Holy Family will mind my having made up the other story about them, do you?" inquired Philomène anxiously. But Godmother only shook her head and smiled.

Philomène certainly asked a great many questions, but then Isolde was never tired of answering them. Yet though she loved her goddaughter dearly, it was not entirely for her own sake. For she was Rachel's child.

Rachel and Isolde had known each other almost all their lives. As little children they strung daisy chains and made cowslip balls together, as school-girls they helped each other with their compositions on Simon de Montfort and the pleasures of a country walk, and when they had grown to womanhood, Rachel's marriage in no way lessened their friendship. It was while she lay dying that she confided her baby to the love of her friend. "Be good to her, beloved, as you have been to me, and I should like her to be called Isolde Philomène—Isolde."

A portrait of Rachel in her wedding-dress hung in Isolde's boudoir, and Philomène had

grown to love the sweet face and the white folds of the train. On entering the room her first glance was always for godmother, and the second for her mother's portrait.

CHAPTER III

WHICH TELLS OF A KEY-HOLE IN A WALL

Now when Philomène was still quite a little girl she had had some playfellows whom neither Nurse nor Miss Mills knew anything about, and these were her green dwarfs and Mrs Handy.

The green dwarfs (there were six of them) lived in the wall beside her bed; they wore pointed shoes and peaked hats, and they waited upon her as pages. She could not remember ever having deliberately invented them; she had gradually come to know them. No sooner had Nurse closed the bedroom door and sat down to her sewing-machine at the schoolroom table, than Philomène would knock upon the wall against which her bed was placed, and the dwarfs would appear, not all together, but one by one, peaked hats foremost. Then they would keep her amused, generally by story-telling, till she felt herself growing drowsy, when she would wave her hand right royally, and back they would disappear into the wall.

Mrs Handy was her companion in the daytime, and she was a most useful friend, equally good at inventing games and at helping with lessons. Moreover, strange to say, she always came to live at Sideview when Godmother was out of town, and as soon as Godmother returned, Mrs Handy would take a journey to Troy or the Rocky Mountains, or some such place of interest, promising to re-visit Sideview as soon as Godmother left London, and to be sure and give Philomène an exciting account of her adventures abroad.

But as Philomène grew older, she gradually realised with sorrow that neither the green dwarfs nor Mrs Handy were anything more than a make-believe, and in her grief at having had to say goodbye to them, she turned for comfort to the pleasures of story-writing, and to the thought of the mysterious key-hole in the garden wall.

The garden of Sideview was flanked on three sides by a wall, and on the fourth by the back of the house. There was a lawn bordered by a path, and at the end farthest from the house there was a large strawberry bed. Flowerbeds were laid out between the path and the wall, some young fruit-trees that never seemed

to bear any fruit grew near the strawberry bed, and close to the house an iron staircase, with a pump at the foot of it, climbed to the level of a garden door that opened out of the schoolroom.

"I wish a fairy caretaker with a red cloak lived in our garden wall, and would tell me stories as she did to Mrs Molesworth's children," thought Philomène regretfully, "but then that was in the 'Enchanted Garden,' and I never did see a garden in all my life that looked less enchanted than ours. It is so flat, and there is no water in it, unless you count the pump, no pond or fountain, and it isn't a bit neglected either, with the man coming twice a week to mow the grass."

One large flower-bed, about half-way down the garden, was Philomène's very own. It was divided in two by a tiny path, on either side of which grew marigolds and London-pride, and her initials in mustard and cress. The box-bordered path ended abruptly where it ran against the wall, and it was in this wall that the unaccountable key-hole was to be seen. Philomène reasoned that where there was a key-hole there must be a key and a person to turn it, yet she had watched it by

the hour, as a cat watches a mouse-hole, but without result, so that at last she gave up hope, and went back to her story-writing.

It was an afternoon early in May, tea was over, and Philomène sat in the red-cushioned rocking-chair, scribbling her latest novel. It was very quiet in the schoolroom; only the ticking of the cuckoo clock, the click of Nurse's knitting-needles, and the scratching of Philomène's pen were to be heard.

"There had come to the castle," Philomène had just written, "an old man who must have seen the snowdrops herald the Spring some ninety times, with an aged woman to cook." She was not altogether pleased with the sound of this sentence when it was finished, but after making several vain attempts to alter it, she added a foot-note: "Bad grammar, but unavoidable."

"Miss Philomène," said Nurse, "I wish you would go out into the garden, like a dear good child. Only look at the fine weather, and it isn't as if you were writing anything for Miss Mills neither." So Philomène rose reluctantly, after having first written "To be con" at the end of the page, for she had not as yet made up her mind whether the story was "to be

continued" or "concluded in our next." Then she fetched her garden hat, and went to fill her watering-can at the pump.

It was still and sunny in the open, and the hum of insects sounded louder than the hum of traffic. In the lilac bush a blackbird was practising his grace-notes, so as to be in good voice for the many concerts of the on-coming season, and a warm west wind passed through the garden in long, happy sighs, as though the young summer were drawing its first deep breaths of lazy contentment. Philomène began watering and weeding her garden, and from time to time she looked up at the key-hole in the wall.

"If one is just ordinary oneself," she said half aloud, "and lives in an ordinary house, I expect fairy things simply can't happen. Some day, though, I must write a book about them, as if they really had happened; I suppose that is the next best thing."

At that moment she caught sight of a dandelion about to seed, growing between her box borders; she stooped to pick the beautiful thing, and at once began to blow upon the "nursery clock," so that the seeds took wing in all directions.

CHAPTER IV

WHICH INTRODUCES SWEET WILLIAM

"If you could let me have the right time, I should be obliged to you," said a voice at her elbow. Philomène started, so that the now dishevelled globe of seeds fell from her hand on to the gravel, and she turned to see who it was that had spoken to her. By her side stood a little man in a vivid green suit; in her first surprise she thought it must be one of the six dwarfs come back to her again, but in another moment she noticed that his shoes had rounded toes, and that his hat, although pointed, had a red and white cockade in it.

"That is not the proper way in which to treat a watch, child," said the mannikin crossly, and stooping to pick up the dandelion, he blew upon it gently.

"Five o'clock," said he, "just about tea-time." And then Philomène's heart gave a sudden throb, for out of his waistcoat pocket he took a key, which he fitted into the key-hole.

"'IF YOU COULD LET ME HAVE THE RIGHT TIME
I SHOULD BE OBLIGED TO YOU'"

A little stone door swung outwards in the wall, and the mannikin hesitated upon the threshold.

"All things considered," he remarked slowly, "and especially the green ribbons, I think I may do myself the pleasure of asking you to step in."

He was speaking quite politely this time, and Philomène entered, her pulse all in a flutter, like some bird that has flown in by the window and cannot find its way out again. The door shut to behind her, and she saw that she was in a little square room. The ceiling was of stone, as indeed was only to be expected, since it was part of the wall, but the floor was daintily if unevenly paved with shells of different tints and sizes, while the walls were tapestried with catkins. In the middle of the room stood a monster mushroom, serving as a table, with big toadstools to match on either side for chairs. The lighting was supplied by a will-o'-the-wisp, which hovered about near the ceiling till called for, when it would settle wherever it was needed. Philomène accepted the seat offered her on one of the toadstools, while the little man went to a hollow, mossgrown tree-stump in a corner

of the room, and began to look for something inside it.

"You must excuse my going to the cupboard and waiting upon myself," he remarked. "I do keep a tomtit, but the weather was so fine that I thought it only fair to give him an afternoon out, so I must lay my own tea." He placed one half of a walnut-shell, a few clover blossoms, and a scrap of honey-comb upon the mushroom table, and sat down on the other toadstool, opposite to his guest.

"If you have not already had your tea," he continued, "I can recommend this dew, which is of the very finest quality, and kept cool by means of an icicle. I get my honey from an excellent firm, Buzz, Bumble and Buzz, Limited, and the clover was picked this morning. Plain fare, my dear, for this luxury-loving age, but thoroughly wholesome, I assure you. Have some?"

"I have had my tea already, thank you," said Philomène, "but I do like the sweet ends of clover very much, if you could spare me one flower."

"Certainly, certainly," said the mannikin, and he handed her two, one white and one pink.

"Would you mind telling me, please," began Philomène, "what you meant just now by speaking about green ribbons? Whose green ribbons?"

"Yours, of course," said the little man. "I shouldn't need any. If it hadn't been for those green ribbons on your christening robe, my young friend, you wouldn't be sitting here now. It is only the children that have worn green ribbons at their christening who can see the fairies at all."

"Then you really, really are a fairy?" cried Philomène.

"Should I be living in this house and eating these things if I weren't?" retorted her host. "I am a fairy, and my name is Sweet William."

"Am I to call you that?" asked Philoméne, doubtfully.

She could not help feeling that the name sounded very affectionate, and that it might be forward for her to use it upon so short an acquaintance.

"I don't know what else you're to call me," said the little man, "it strikes me as a very good name of its kind. Perhaps I ought to tell you that I am the fairies' land- and house-agent for this garden; I chose it for various

reasons, partly so as to be near you, for it is the business of the fairies to look after lonely children."

"I suppose I ought to thank him," thought Philomène, feeling painfully shy, but Sweet Wiliam rattled on and left her no time.

"You have probably no idea how much work even a small garden like this entails. I have to attend to the housing of all the live creatures, for one thing, the bees and snails and birds and caterpillars and so on. The flowers are not troublesome, for they stay in one place for quite a long time, but the spiders, for instance, are for ever moving house."

"It must be very interesting work," said Philomène politely. She had often heard people make this remark to her father.

"Not bad," said Sweet William, "if one keeps one's eyes and ears open. From being the agent in a big garden, just about a hundred and fifty years ago, I once pieced together a whole love-story. It was an old manor-house, and had a very fine garden."

"That is the sort of place I should love to live in," said Philomène, "with oriel windows and avenues and things."

"It is a modern failing to find fault with one's

surroundings," said Sweet William pompously, "and young people are especially prone to it. As I was saying when you interrupted me, it was a fine garden. The family was very old and very proud, and they kept a peacock on the terrace. On one side of the lawn ran a green walk and a clipped yew-hedge, and it was here that my lovers used to walk, up and down, up and down, at sunset. The hedge overheard every word of what they said, for you see, being a hedge he could not very well help eavesdropping. Well, one day they had to say goodbye, and he went away and left her very sad, and I got to know all about that part of it from a red rose, which he had picked that last evening, and the girl had pressed the rose in a big book, and every day she would sit and read in the book, and would look at the page where the red rose lay. 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' The rose told me that she had grown desperately tired of having nothing but this one sentence to read, but the girl never seemed to tire of it. Then at last her lover came back for her, and they went away together to the little harbour near by, and one of Mother Carey's chickens told me that they were married in the church on the

cliff. After that I heard no more of them for some time, till one day I chanced to pick up a sea-shell on the beach near the harbour. I had had no tidings of the mer-folk for ever such a long while, so I put the shell to my ear and let the sea tell me some, and amongst other things it told me about those two, and how they had taken ship for the south. The last news I had of them was from the wind, for he is such a great traveller that he seldom loses sight of people, but the worst of him is that like most travellers he is always in a hurry, so he could only stop to tell me that he had seen them last in another garden, walking up and down an avenue of cypresses with bits of broken statues on either side; only he was not holding her hand this time, for she was carrying a white bundle in her arms. The wind had not waited to find out its precise nature, but he had overheard a few of their remarks as he went by, and would you believe it, they were just exactly the same as those which the yew-hedge had repeated to me."

"There is a nice big cypress tree at the Cushats," said Philomène, "but I have never seen a whole avenue of them. I wish I could. Oh, Sweet William, I do get so bored some-

times living in a little house with a little garden, and nothing exciting happening all day long."

"Boredom," said Sweet William, "is a modern complaint to which the young are peculiarly prone."

"I wish he would call something an ancient complaint to which old people were prone," thought Philomène. "And I'm sure it's just as bad to be always finding fault with the times in which one lives as with the house." But out loud she only said, "And may I come here sometimes, please, and will you tell me a few more stories? Godmother tells me beautiful stories which she makes up as she goes along, but she has so many people to visit and so many things to do that I cannot see her very often, and I know all my books nearly by heart, and Nurse can only tell stories about the families she was with before she came to me, and all those children seem to have been so dull and good."

"In these days," replied Sweet William, "next to nothing can be done without first passing examinations, so if you are willing to come here to-morrow afternoon at about this time by a reliable clock (don't go by the

nursery clock, for it is not very well regulated), I will set you an examination paper all about fairies and fairyland. If you do well in it, that is to say if your marks add up to 75 per cent, you shall have a prize."

"What will the prize be?" asked Philomène, shyly.

"A latch-key just like mine, so that you can let yourself in, whether I am at home or not. And now," said Sweet William rising, "I really must be off. I have a lot of extra work in the spring time, with all the swallows coming home."

Philomène rose also, and the little door swung open in the wall. She stepped out upon the path, and the sunlight dazzled her, so that she had to shade her eyes with her hand. "I am very glad to have met you, and I will certainly come again to-morrow," she was just beginning to say, when she noticed that Sweet William was gone. For a minute she stood and stared at the keyhole, which stared back at her. A warm west wind went past her, the blackbird was still singing his heart out in the lilac-bush, and the air was full of the fragrance of green and growing things. At her feet lay the dandelion stalk.

Philomène picked up her watering-can and ran with it up the iron staircase into the schoolroom, where she found Nurse asleep in her favourite basket chair. "Oh, Nurse, do wake up, dear good old Nurse," she called out eagerly, "and tell me who put green ribbons on to my christening dress!"

"Bless the child," returned Nurse drowsily, "who ever has been talking that nonsense to you? It was your godmother, and a heathenish fancy I thought it too at the time. And there's no call for you to be speaking so loud either that I can see; I wasn't asleep, I was only resting my eyes."

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH THE HEROINE DISTINGUISHES HERSELF

THE next day seemed a long time in coming, but come it did. So did Miss Mills. Miss Mills was young and pretty, and she thought herself even prettier than she was. During the past year or two, she had been giving daily lessons to Philomène, but she was not fond of teaching, and her temper was uncertain.

"Tell me at once," she said sharply, as the lesson dragged itself towards its close, "what did Edwin and Morcar do?"

"They ruled with rods of iron," responded Philomène absently.

"You are not attending properly, child," said Miss Mills, "or you would not repeat things parrot-fashion out of the book in that way. Do you suppose that one took the poker and the other the tongs? And, you know, you were very careless too about reciting your psalm this morning, saying that the trees of

the Lord were full of soup, when you know perfectly well that they aren't any such thing. What has come over you? Take down your work for to-morrow."

It was no wonder that Philomène found it difficult to attend to her lessons that day, for she could think of little else than the coming examination, and when tea at last appeared she felt too much excited to eat.

"Now don't begin to be faddy, Miss, like Master Harold," said Nurse.

"Who was Master Harold?" asked Philomène, "he wasn't one of the Ruthven-Smiths, was he?"

"No," said Nurse, "he was one of their cousins, and he came to stay with them, and a mighty long visit he paid too. I never did like him from the first moment I set eyes on him; he was all fads and fancies, and one day, I remember, he made my poor dear little Miss Maisie cry by telling her that her legs looked like two snakes that had swallowed oranges, and they were no fatter than his own in the middle, for that matter. But if you won't get along with your tea, Miss, you had better say grace, and run into the garden."

Outside the afternoon's sad yellow sunlight

lay all across the lawn; it awoke diamond flashes in the wall, and even gilded the handle of the pump. The metallic notes of the starlings were heard on every side, and London was doing its best to forget that it was the largest pile of brick and mortar in the world. Philomène ran to her own garden and up its little pathway. A great fear was at her heart lest yesterday's experience should prove to have been a make-up also, and nothing more, like Mrs Handy and the rest. Tremblingly she tapped upon the wall, and prompt to her signal came the sound of a step inside, and the turning of the key in the key-hole. Sweet William stood before her in his green suit, with the red and white cockade in his hat.

"Come in," said he in his delicate high-pitched voice, "everything is quite ready."

Philomène entered, and the catkin tapestries rustled in the draught of the closing door. The little room looked cool and friendly. On the giant mushroom lay a packet of satin-smooth lily petals, a swan's quill pen, and two snails' shells, one filled with red and the other with violet ink, distilled from red roses and from violets. There was also a little pad of moss

upon which to dry the pen. Philomène sat down upon the nearest toadstool.

"Well," said Sweet William pleasantly, "have you been reading up much for the examination?"

"No, not much," returned Philomène, "I really know all that's in my books already, but I have been trying to remember everything I ever heard about the fairies."

"You see," said Sweet William, "the Good People do not like letting children into their secrets who have not first taken the trouble to find out all they can about us for themselves. Now we had better begin, and here are the questions. Number your pages, and pin them together with this thorn when you have finished writing. There is a sun-dial in the next garden, and he has promised to send word when the time is up."

For the next hour Philomène wrote busily; she did not even look round when Sweet William opened a door opposite to that by which she herself had entered, and spoke to someone outside.

"It was a grasshopper," said Sweet William, "and he came to say that the hour is over. Poor fellow, he spends his time trying to reach the sun by high hops, and his friend the dial

keeps on assuring him that it is of no use, but the grasshopper will not believe him. He thinks it is only that the dial has lost heart and got depressed, from having had "Art is long and time is fleeting" written across him for so many years."

Philomène was pinning her papers together. "I have done my best," said she, with a threatening of tears in her voice, "but I am afraid it won't be prize-standard."

"Well, let us see," said Sweet William encouragingly, as he took the neatly written sheets into his hands, "I will read aloud the questions and what you have written, correcting your mistakes as I go along, and then we will add up the marks. Perhaps you would like some refreshments after all that hard work; here are some bee-bread and purest rain-water." So saying, Sweet William settled himself comfortably upon his stool, dipped his pen into the red ink, and began.

"'1. Give the names of the King and Queen of Fairyland, of the King's favourite page, and of the Queen's four chief attendant elves.'

"'Oberon, Titania, Puck, Master Mustard-seed, Master Peasblossom, Master Cobweb, Master Moth.'

"Perfectly correct. The maximum for that is six marks; half a mark for the King's name, half a mark for the Queen's, and a whole mark for each of the five elves. Now then:

"'II. What events do you connect with the following dates; April 30th, June 23rd, October 31st, and December 24?'

"'April 30th is the Walpurgis Night, when the witches dance on the top of a mountain called the Brocken. June 23rd is midsummer eve, when all the goblins and sprites are abroad, and you light fires to keep them at a distance; sometimes also you hang up a hatchet in a wood, so that they can hew themselves timber if they will. On December 24th animals and all lifeless things are able to speak.'

"I see you have left out October 31st. Didn't you know it? It is the great feast of Samhain, or of All Fairies."

"It is All Hallows' Eve with us," replied Philomène innocently, and then remembered with a pang that fairies cannot bear the sound of church bells, because it reminds them of a power that is stronger than their strongest magic. "So I do not suppose they like the Saints much either," she reflected ruefully.

"Well, it is All Fairies' with us, at any rate,"

said Sweet William, speaking rather fast, "which makes three marks out of a maximum of four for the second question. Now for the third.

"'III. Write all you know, (A) about Leprechauns; (B) about Brownies.'

"'(A). Leprechauns are little men dressed all in green, who generally live in Ireland; at least I have never heard of their living anywhere else. They are the fairies' cobblers, and are kept very busy because the fairies dance so much that they wear out any number of shoes. They also know where all the crocks of gold and other hidden treasures are kept, and if you find a leprechaun, and don't take your eyes off him, he is obliged to give you anything you want, but he tries to startle you and make you look away, and then you have lost your power over him, unless you can catch him again. The best thing to do is to take him to running water, for he is very much afraid of that, and will promise you anything rather than stay near it.'

"'(B) Brownies are little men who come into houses during the night, or very early in the morning before anyone is up, and sweep and dust and lay the fires, and make themselves

very useful. You may put a bowl of bread and milk for them, or even cream, if you want to show that you are grateful, but you must never offer them new suits of clothes. Some people have caught sight of them, and seen how ragged their coats were, and have made new clothes for them, and left these near the bread and milk, but when the brownies saw that they went away, and never came back again. I suppose it offends them.'

"Quite right. You have full marks for that question, five for A and five for B. That makes the whole ten for the third question.

"'IV. Write short notes on:—fairy ring; fairy-gold; witch-apples; blackthorn; the rainbow.'

"'A fairy ring is a circle of teeny mushrooms in the grass, and it marks the place where the fairies have been dancing over-night. If you should ever happen to fall from a height down into the middle of one of these rings, you would not hurt yourself, not even if you fell from the clouds.

"'Fairy gold is not very satisfactory, for when mortals touch it, it all turns into withered leaves.

"'Witch-apples are very dangerous things, for if a witch gives you an apple, and you eat

it, it makes you restless ever after, so that you are never able to settle down to anything again.

" 'Blackthorn is the fairies' tree, and they do not like its being picked by us, or brought into our houses. That is why some people say that it is unlucky to bring home blackthorn after a country walk, and other people get a little mixed and think that it is hawthorn which is unlucky, but it isn't.'

" Ah ! I see you have left out the rainbow. Do you mean to tell me you don't know what a rainbow is for ? "

" I don't think so," replied Philomène with some hesitation ; Noah was in her mind, but she fancied that Sweet William might find him as little acceptable as the Saints. She therefore determined to run no risks this time.

" It is the triumphal arch," explained Sweet William, " which is thrown up whenever the fairy queen is expected to pass that way."

" I never heard that before," said Philomène, " and I like the idea very much (though I feel quite sure Nurse wouldn't)," she added to herself.

" It isn't an idea," retorted Sweet William rather huffily, " it is a custom. Let me see, that makes four out of five marks for the

fourth question," he continued, "and now for number five.

"'v. Copy three bars of music from the song, either of a mermaid, or of the Lorelei.'

"Five marks for that question. But I see you have left it out altogether?"

"I have never had a chance of hearing the Lorelei," answered Philomène, "for no one has ever taken me to the Rhine, and I have not heard any mermaids either, though the Cushats is near the sea."

"Well, perhaps it was not quite a fair question," said Sweet William, "but never mind, you have done very well so far, and you can well afford to lose five marks at this stage. Let us see what you have made of number six.

"'VI. Complete the following quotations, and state if possible, in what work of which author each occurs.

(A) All under the sun belongs to men;

(B) Where the bee sucks, there lurk I.

(A) And all under the moon to the fairies.
From Mrs EWING's "Amelia and the Dwarfs."

(B) In a cowslip's bell I lie;
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.

Merrily, merrily shall I live now,
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.'
From SHAKESPEARE'S 'Tempest.'

"Very good indeed. Two marks for (A) and three for (B), which makes five. You have full marks for that question. You must have a good memory.

"'VII. (A). When did toads not turn into what, and if not, why not, and what did they turn into?'

"'(B). Supposing yourself to be escaping from an enchanter's dwelling, what three articles would be likely to prove of the most use to you, and why?'

"'(A). In the story of "Eliza and the Eleven Swans," out of Hans Andersen, the wicked stepmother throws toads into Eliza's bath, wishing to poison her. The toads were so ugly that they could not turn into roses, which they would like to have done, and which less ugly creatures might have been able to do, but they did manage to turn into poppies, for Eliza was so good that they could not harm her. Miss Mills says toads are not really poisonous.'

"'(B). I should take with me' (it would have been better to say,—If I were escaping from

an enchanter's dwelling I should take with me—always repeat your question in your answer, it saves the examiner trouble,) 'I should take with me a comb, a flower-pot and a tumbler of water, because when the enchanter pursues you, you can throw the comb behind you, and it turns into a ridge of mountains, and he has to waste time going back and fetching a ladder so as to be able to climb up them; later you can throw the flower-pot behind you which turns into a forest, so that the enchanter has to turn back again and fetch a hatchet to cut down the trees; afterwards you can throw the glass of water behind you, which turns into a lake, so that he has first to get a boat. By that time you have generally arrived at your own kingdom or wherever else you want to go.'

"Yes, that is very well answered. You get full marks for that question also, two and a half for (A), and two and a half for (B). Now there is only number eight left.

"'VIII. Write in note form, and as concisely as possible, any story out of Grimm's fairy-tales.'

"I see you have chosen the story of the flounder.

"'Fisherman catches flounder. Flounder owns to being a prince; is let go. Fisherman's

wife annoyed at wasted opportunity. Fisherman goes back to beach, finds flounder, states wish. Fisherman's hovel vanishes, nice cottage instead. Fortnight later fisherman's wife grumbles. Fisherman returns to flounder, flounder rather cross. Cottage disappears, stone castle instead. After few days fisherman's wife grumbles again, sends husband back to flounder. Flounder crosser. Sea rough. However, castle vanishes, king's palace instead. Fisherman goes home to find wife already discontented because only queen, not empress. Has to return to beach. Flounder angry. Sea very rough. King's palace disappears, emperor's palace comes instead. Wife says she wants to be Pope, sends husband back to beach. Flounder very angry. Sea stormy. Emperor's palace goes, Pope's palace comes. Sunrise next morning. Wife sees it, says she wants to be able to make the sun rise. Fisherman returns to seashore. Sea running mountains high. No flounder, voice only. Fisherman returns to find old hovel back again.'

"The maximum there is ten marks," Sweet William said, after he had finished reading the notes aloud, "and you have remembered the story well, all but the rhyme."

"I did remember the rhyme though," said Philomène eagerly, "and I had meant to add it, but just then the grasshopper came. The first time the fisherman says :—

> 'Flounder, flounder in the sea,
> Come, I pray, and talk with me,
> For my wife, Dame Isabel,
> Sent me here a tale to tell.'

And all the other times he says :—

> 'For my wife, Dame Isabel,
> Wishes what I fear to tell.'"

"Capital!" exclaimed Sweet William with enthusiasm, "Philomène rightly named, beloved of the fairies! It is not often we have the good luck to come across such a child. Now we will add up the marks. Six for the first question, three for the second, ten for the third, four for the fourth, none for the fifth, five for the sixth, five for the seventh, ten for the eighth. That makes forty-three out of fifty, which is eighty-six per cent. I congratulate you, my dear, and have much pleasure in presenting you with a latch-key, exactly like my own."

Philomène's face lit up, her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled, but "Thank you very

much " was all she said as she took the key and slipped it into her pocket.

" I expect it will be a treat for you to come out here now and again," said Sweet William, watching her closely, " not indeed that there isn't plenty to amuse you indoors."

" Not indoors at home," said Philomène, decidedly, " Daddy is out nearly all day, and though Nurse and Miss Mills are very kind and all that, they are neither of them any good at fairy things, or at plays, or at story-telling. It seems to me it is often very dull at home."

" The very young," remarked Sweet William, gazing into space, " and more particularly the young of the present day, are apt to condemn the place in which they live because they are themselves too stupid to find out its attractions. Do you follow me ? "

" I can't very well help following you," said Philomène, almost losing her temper, " but if you lived at Sideview yourself, perhaps you would not find it so very amusing either. Even Daddy says it is an uninteresting little house, though of course I try to be contented so as to please him, but it is not at all so easy as you make out. It isn't a bit like the ' House of Surprises ' in the story-book."

"A good many surprising things go on in it, notwithstanding," retorted Sweet William, "as Master Mustardseed could very well tell you, if you only had the sense to listen to him a bit when you are alone together."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand you about Master Mustardseed," said Philomène, "why should I need to be alone with him specially?"

"Because," replied Sweet William calmly, "he is every bit as much a fairy as I am."

"A fairy! What fairy?" cried Philomène, jumping off the stool in her excitement.

"What fairy? Why, Master Mustardseed, of course. Haven't you been writing about him only this very afternoon? Just you listen to a piece of good advice. When next you are left alone for any length of time, get as near as ever you can to his cage. And now goodbye for the present, for I am still up to my eyes in work."

"Goodbye," said Philomène, and she felt in her pocket to make sure that the key was still there.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH THE HEROINE TAKES ADVICE

Philomène ran down the garden walk, her mind in a turmoil. Queen Mab was trotting to meet her along the path, and as soon as she caught sight of her pet, she knelt down on the gravel and held out her arms to it. "O Queen Mab, Queen Mab," she cried, "I am so happy! It seems it doesn't matter being ordinary, if only the Good People love one." The cat had scrambled upon her lap in an instant, and was rubbing a white velvety head against her arm, and licking her hand with a little tongue as rough as it was red. Philomène carried her pussy into the schoolroom, and set it down on the bearskin hearth-rug; then she glanced curiously at the canary in his cage, but he was pecking at the seeds in his seed-trough, and took no notice of her.

Before nightfall it rained. Nurse said it was because Lilian Augusta had sung "Summer suns are glowing" that morning, which, she

declared, invariably brought on wet weather. The next day it went on raining, but despite the downpour Miss Mills happened to be in a good humour, and this was just as well, for it was the turn of what Philomène called "the little speckled book," and it is not easy to give your attention to little speckled books when your thoughts are full of fairies. "The World and All About It" was a very plump little volume, and the squatness of its figure was only equalled by the omniscience of its author. It explained at the beginning who had made the world and why; it gave the exact date for the invention of pottery, and described the best way of handling chopsticks. Philomène had just been learning all about the chameleon, and of how by changing its colour it escapes the notice of its enemies.

"Does not this show the care which Providence takes of all its creatures?" demanded Miss Mills.

"I suppose so," replied Philoméne, thoughtfully.

"Don't say, 'I suppose so,'" returned Miss Mills, "the answer in the book is "Yes." But the rebuke was given gently and with a smile, and Philomène was gladder than ever of this

easy-going mood when it came to the Scripture lesson, which was her weekly nightmare. For when Miss Mills taught the Scriptures she succeeded in making them as dry as the biscuit which the Red Queen gave to Alice. "Thirst quenched, I hope?" said the Red Queen, and happily did not wait for an answer.

Nurse declined to venture out-of-doors that day, and an interview with Master Mustardseed was impossible, so when lessons were over Philomène went down to the kitchen to help Lilian Augusta grate the chocolate for a pudding. She found her singing to herself, "And now this holy day is drawing to its end." "But I don't see that it is so very holy," reflected Philomène, "and it isn't anywhere near its end either. Nurse says it is just out of contrariness that Lilian Augusta likes to sing, "The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended" while she is washing up the breakfast things, and "When morning gilds the skies" over the tea-things, but then I think Nurse is sometimes very cross to Lilian Augusta, and perhaps she doesn't mean all she sings."

Lilian Augusta and Philomène were good friends, and had quarrelled only twice, once when the first canary had been allowed to

make its escape, and another time on Queen Mab's account. Lilian Augusta had no love for cats, and she was not pleased therefore when after some fruitless advertising it was settled that Queen Mab should become a member of the household. Philoméne, bent on making peace, had carried her new pet into the kitchen and had placed it on the table.

"You know, Lilian Augusta," she said coaxingly, "we really couldn't have put such a little, little cat out into the street again, could we? Only see how small it is, and who would have fed it?"

"God, I suppose, Miss," replied Lilian Augusta unmoved, as she measured out the curry-powder. But Philomène would not hear of this.

"Poor Pussy!" she exclaimed resentfully, "poor, poor Pussy!" And snatching up Queen Mab she walked straight out of the kitchen and did not re-visit it that day. Lilian Augusta, however, had grown first indifferent to the white cat, and then fond of it, for Queen Mab had pretty endearing ways, besides which, devotion to Philomène was at all times a passport to the faithful servant's good opinion.

For several days the steady rain continued; gardeners rejoiced, other people grumbled. Philomène consoled herself with an occasional peep at her tall silver savings-box, in which she now treasured her latch-key. This savings-box of hers was never looked at, for her father wished her to do as she pleased with her pocket-money, and she had therefore chosen it as a hiding-place for the key. On these wet days, when she could not play in the garden, it was a comfort merely to look at the key through the slit in the lid of the box. Towards the end of the week the rain abated, though it did not stop altogether. People were beginning to cheer up all round, excepting, of course, the gardeners, who said that the soil was sodden, and that the rain had brought the slugs.

Nurse laid aside the pinafore she had been making, and shut her work-box with a snap. "I want to get some insertion," she announced, "the same as is on your other pinafores. I must see if I can match it,"

"Am I to come too, Nurse?" inquired Philomène anxiously.

"I don't see the necessity, Miss. You had your walk this morning. You had better stay in and meet your father when he comes home,

I should say. He might be back within the next hour."

Philomène breathed more freely. "I would ask Lilian Augusta to do that much shopping for me," continued Nurse, "but it's her time off to-day, and what's more she never can match things, not so much as a bit of binding. I'm sure it's very good of the Lord to make me as patient as I am with Lilian Augusta every day of my life."

No sooner had the hall-door banged downstairs than Master Mustardseed burst into song, so full of joyous trills and turns and crushing-notes, that someone who knew no better might have supposed he was merely showing what difficult music he could contrive to sing if he gave his mind to it. Philomène cautiously put two fingers through the bars of his cage, and at that the canary stopped singing as abruptly as he had begun, cocked his little green head on one side, and perched upon her hand. Then he spoke in a shrill, small voice,

"No need to introduce myself, I suppose?" he said gaily. His manner was good-humoured and easy, and Philomène thought, rightly enough, that he would prove far slower to take offence than her friend the land-agent.

"No," she said, "Sweet William has told me that Master Mustardseed is really your name; and oh! you cannot think what a difference it has made to me during lesson time to feel that there is a real fairy in the schoolroom. I used to think sometimes, when it was quiet and getting late, that if I listened I might hear my toys talking, as they do in nearly all the story-books, but that never came to anything. Perhaps I didn't wait long enough, or perhaps they knew I was listening."

"The story-books are not always as accurate on that point as they ought to be," replied the canary, "it is really not at all so easy to hear toys talk as they make out. To begin with, the house has to be quite empty; there must be no daylight in the room, only firelight or moonlight; and there must be no time going on."

"How could that be managed?" asked Philomène, as Master Mustardseed paused to take breath, for he spoke nearly as fast as he sang.

"The clock must have stopped," said Master Mustardseed, "so you see, it is rather a difficult matter first and last. You have no idea, by

the way, what confusion you caused in the dolls' house the other day by making the dolls play at a wedding."

"I am sorry if I upset them," said Philomène in distress, "I thought I should like to have a wedding, because I had read in my history lesson that morning about King Louis XII. of France, and how he over-ate himself at his own wedding-banquet when he married Mary Tudor, and he died, and she was ever so pleased, and went quickly and married someone else."

"I daresay," said Master Mustardseed, laughing, "but you married two dolls who did not in the least want to marry each other, poor things, and what was worse, the mistress of the house had invited the Gollywog and the Father Christmas to lunch, and she had to tell them not to come, as there were not enough plates to go round. How would you like to have to do that if you were a hostess? The dolls' own lives are constantly being interrupted and interfered with by those who play with them, but of course I see that it cannot be helped, and it isn't your fault. It is the fault of whoever made them dolls."

"I will look very hard at them next time

I want to play," said Philomène remorsefully, "and perhaps I shall see from the expression on their faces whether they have a funeral or a party or anything of their own fixed for that day. Poor dears, I hope they don't hate me. But, oh please, will you tell me something about yourself now, and why you are here?"

"Well, as you have already heard," replied the canary, "I am Master Mustardseed, one of the fairy queen's four favourite pages, so you made a remarkably good shot at my name. As for why I am here—well, have you never heard that once every hundred years fairies have to turn into animals for a year and a day, and if they are killed during that time, so much the worse for them, for you see, we haven't what you call souls. However, if we survive that year and that day, we can go back to Fairyland for another hundred years. Now my friend and brother page, Master Moth, of whom I daresay you have heard, had to put in his time before my turn came, and he lived with you as your first canary; but when his year was over he flew away, and knowing that I had shortly to make up my mind what to change into myself, he recommended me to come here, saying that you were a very kind

little mistress, and that I might go farther and fare worse. That is why I came, and as for my staying longer than a year and a day, why, my dear, before I left Fairyland I played a prank on the Man in the Moon. He had come to court for the first time, and we pages thought him something of a country cousin. You see, he did not know anything at all about court etiquette, and made absurd mistakes. I thought out the prank all by myself, for I did not want Puck or Moth or Cobweb or Peasblossom to know anything about it; it does not do to have too many people in a secret. All would have gone off well enough, had not the Man in the Moon complained to headquarters. It appears he cannot take a joke; and indeed I might have guessed as much, for I expect you have noticed even at this distance what a wry face he can make. The king and queen were so much displeased that they banished me from court for three years, and I thought I had much better stay on here. But if one day I leave you, you must not be sorry, for I shall only have flown back to Fairyland."

"Do many of the fairies turn into songbirds?" asked Philomène.

"Yes, a good many of them," replied Master Mustardseed, "and the court musician always turns into a nightingale. As for the fairies who dislike the bother of housekeeping, they become cuckoos, and lay their eggs in other birds' nests, which saves them a lot of trouble. Brownies become bees and ants, for they cannot bear to be idle, and a court-lady as often as not turns into a butterfly or humming-bird for the sake of the fine clothes."

"Have you ever heard the Lorelei sing?" inquired Philomène, "I had to leave out the question about her in Sweet William's examination paper."

"No," replied Master Mustardseed decidedly, "I have always avoided the lady. You know, I suppose, what it is that she sings for? The boatmen hear her, and listen and listen, and watch her combing her shimmering hair, and forget to steer their boats, so that they are sucked down into the whirlpools of the Rhine. The gnomes never did mortals a worse turn than when they made that golden comb for her, and when all's said and done her hair is no prettier than your own godmother's. But don't let's talk about her any more; I

know plenty of stories about much nicer people. Perhaps you would like to hear one right away. Stop me if I talk too fast; Moth says it is a failing of mine."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH MASTER MUSTARDSEED TELLS HIS STORY

"In a mean, dingy house in the midst of a great city, there once lived a cobbler and his apprentice, and together with them in that same house there also lived a certain evil and malicious boggart. Now a boggart is just the opposite of a brownie, for while a brownie tidies and sweeps and puts things to rights, a boggart only works mischief and makes confusion. He would break the crockery, and mislay the tools in the workshop, and once he dropped so much salt into the soup that the cobbler lay awake half the night with thirst. Now the cobbler, who was a harsh, unreasonable man, suspected his apprentice of these pranks, and soon took him roughly to task.

"Master," said the apprentice, "you do me wrong. It is not I who have done you this harm, but a mannikin in tattered clothes and a peaked cap. It must be that we are living

under one roof with a boggart, for more than once have I seen him at his tricks when twilight fell."

But the cobbler would not believe a word of what the apprentice said, for he himself had never set eyes on the boggart, and though one day the apprentice pointed him out, not even then could he catch so much as a glimpse of him. It is true that the cobbler's yellow cat, who lay stretched upon the hearth, could see the imp plainly enough with her green and glimmering eyes, but then it was not in her power to say so, nor to put in a good word for the apprentice.

"You had better stop making game of me," said the angry cobbler, each time that a fresh mishap occurred, "for my temper is but a short one, and I am growing tired of your fool's tricks, and of your fool's tales too, for that matter, about boggarts and what not, so mark my words, and mend your ways."

Now one evening as the cobbler sat stitching at a neighbour's shoes, he said to the apprentice, "I am ready for my supper. Go and get me the flitch of bacon from the corner cupboard." But when the apprentice opened the cupboard door, the bacon was nowhere to be seen.

"Master, it is gone!" he cried, "I fear the boggart has played you another trick, and this time it is an ill turn indeed!"

"The boggart! The boggart! What's all this talk of boggarts?" screamed the cobbler, "so I have been teaching my trade to a thief, have I? You're a fine fellow to keep as an apprentice, eating a poor man out of house and home! Get you gone from my door, or you shall have blows from me, and not words alone."

Again the apprentice tried to defend himself, but his master would not listen, so he sadly put together his few belongings in a knapsack, and set out upon his travels, with none to wish him well save only his friend the yellow cat, who came and rubbed herself against his legs before the house-door closed behind him. All night he paced the streets disconsolate, and at dawn when the city gates stood open he set forth upon the king's highway.

As dusk fell, he entered a wild, bleak hill country, and he had not gone far upon the lonely road when he heard a voice singing a plaintive refrain. Eagerly he hurried onwards, wondering who the wayfarer might be, but soon the singing ceased, and a sound of weeping

took its place. Then the apprentice caught sight of a maiden seated upon the grassy bank by the roadside. She was beautifully dressed in silks and jewels, but briers clung to her rich trailing robes, and the blustering wind had disordered her golden tresses.

"Madam," said the apprentice, "if my poor services may assist you, they are at your command."

"I thank you with all my heart," said she, "let us travel on together and seek a night's lodging. But for you I should have been left friendless upon this waste hillside." So together they took the road again, and journeyed on into the mountains.

"I am a king's daughter," said the maiden, "and my father and mother have accused me of witchcraft, and have driven me from my home."

"I too have been driven away on an unjust charge," said the apprentice, "and now I know not how I may earn my bread, for my master the cobbler would not finish teaching me my trade." After that they both fell silent, for they were weary and sad at heart.

Now when they had gone some considerable distance, they overtook a shepherd who was

driving home his flock, and of him they begged a night's shelter.

"Come with me to my goodwife," the kindly shepherd made reply, "and we will do all in our power to serve you both." So saying he guided them to the sheltered hollow where his cottage stood. His wife came to greet him at the doorway, and when she saw the strangers she welcomed them also. In the kitchen a bright fire was burning, and supper was on the table, broth, and bread, and a bowl of porridge, Far back in a shadowy corner of the room sat an old, old woman, toothless and hairless, bent and shrunken with her years.

"That," said the shepherd, "is my grandmother, and she is reputed one of the wisest women in the countryside, but she is aged and weak, and speaks but seldom."

Now as soon as supper was ended, the company drew around the fire, and the shepherd begged his guests to relate the story of their wanderings.

"My father is a mighty king," the princess made answer, "and dwells in a city many leagues distant. Not long ago a strange series of misfortunes befell us. One night as I stood by my window and looked out upon the palace

garden, I saw that a fairy was pillaging the blossom of the king's favourite almond-tree, and I called in haste to my waiting-woman, and pointed the strange sight out to her, but she protested that she could see nothing, and the next morning she went and told my parents what had taken place. The night following I stood again by my window, looking out upon the terrace, and this time I saw a fairy luring away the queen's favourite peacock. Again I called to my waiting-woman, for I was afraid, but again she declared that she could see nothing. The next morning the faithless woman went once more to my parents, and told them what had befallen, and this time she even dared assure them that I must be a witch, for had there indeed been a fairy in the case she would certainly have seen it as well as myself. At first my parents were unwilling to credit her charge, for, said the king my father, the almond-tree had most assuredly been plundered, though none knew by whom, and, said the queen my mother, that the peacock was lost there could be no doubt. Nevertheless, they were both much disturbed, and bade the woman watch me narrowly. Now as evening fell I was sitting in my bower, when all at once I

heard a sound behind me as of breaking flax, and turning round I saw a fairy standing in the middle of my room, breaking the flax that hung upon my golden spinning-wheel. Then I became frightened, and pointed her out to my waiting-woman, but again she said she saw nothing. The next day when my parents heard what had happened, they summoned me to their presence and questioned me, and I could but affirm that each time I had seen a fairy, though my waiting-woman had seen none. Now the king my father lives in great dread of witches and their charms, and forthwith he charged me with witchcraft, because I saw things that were not good to see, and which were hidden from other folk, and when my mother pleaded for me he would not listen, but said that there was a spell upon the palace and that I must go, or else no one could tell what might come of it, and he sent me away. But indeed, good people, I am no witch, yet the fairies I did most assuredly see, three several times."

After that the apprentice also told his story, and how the cobbler had blamed him for the boggart's pranks, and had driven him out. "Yet I am unjustly accused," said he, "for

I myself saw the boggart at his work, not once nor twice."

"These are the strangest tales that ever I heard!" cried the shepherd.

"The old grandmother is learned in fairy lore," added his wife; "it may be that she can solve the riddle." When she heard that, the princess rose, and went to the dark corner where the old crone sat, and knelt down beside her.

"Tell me, I pray you, good mother," said she, "how comes it that this stranger and I both saw the fairies where others saw none?" But the old crone only blinked at her with dull eyes, and made no reply.

"It is a king's daughter who kneels to you, granddame," cried the shepherd, "will you not give her an answer?"

"A peaked cap and fernseed," muttered the old hag, "the boggart put on his peaked cap, and the fairies carried fernseed."

"But whoever carries fernseed becomes invisible," said the princess, "and in spite of that I saw them."

"Over those who are born on an Ember Day neither a cap of darkness nor the fairies' fern itself has any power," said the crone; "both of you must have been born in one of the four

Ember Weeks." And her voice died away into indistinct mumblings.

"It is a dower that none need envy," quoth the apprentice, and the princess sighed in answer.

Now on the following morning the shepherd and his wife urged the princess to remain with them, and she joyfully consented. "I will not be a burden to you," said she, "for I can spin, and I will learn to do all manner of things about the house, and will take care of the old grandmother."

But the apprentice set out upon his travels again, and this time he felt even sadder than on the previous day, for it went to his heart to part from the princess, whom already he loved for her fair face and gentle ways. After journeying for some distance he left the hills behind him, and at noon he entered a deep and shady wood. There, in a mossy glade, seated upon a bank of primroses, he caught sight of a little man dressed all in green, who was busily mending shoes. But as the apprentice drew nearer, the mannikin flung aside his work, and snatching up a green cap with a sprig of fern in the brim, he set it upon his head.

"That much trouble you might have spared

yourself," laughed the apprentice, "for I was born on an Ember Day, they tell me."

"Is that so?" said the mannikin, and he resumed his cobbling.

"And who may you be?" asked the apprentice.

"I am the fairies' cobbler," replied the little green man.

"Then I pray you teach me my trade," said the apprentice, "for I am a cobbler's apprentice, but I have not served my full time, since my master has sent me away on a wrongful charge."

"Where did your master live?" asked the mannikin.

"Over the hills yonder," replied the apprentice pointing, but when he turned round again the fairies' cobbler was nowhere to be seen. On the instant he felt himself pelted by a shower of acorns from above, and looking up he saw a squirrel, perched among the oak boughs overhead.

"You are a fine fellow for letting your opportunities slip," said the squirrel; "do you not know that when you meet the fairies' cobbler you should never take your eyes off him for a moment? So long as you keep on looking at him, he is bound to give you what-

ever you may ask, though you should demand of him all the crocks of gold in Fairyland, but he will try to startle or deceive you, and then your chance is lost."

"I will remember your good advice another time," said the apprentice, and he went on into the wood. At sunset he came to another glade, and there he once more caught sight of the fairies' cobbler, seated upon a tree-stump.

"This time you shall not escape me," he cried, and fixing his eyes upon the mannikin he repeated his request, "I pray you, teach me my trade."

"The cobbler's craft is not an easy one," replied the little man surlily, "the fairies dance so much and so often that it is all I can do to keep them in shoes. Only look at this pair now—it was new at moonrise."

"They are indeed much worn," said the apprentice, but even as he spoke he became aware that the fairies' cobbler had once more disappeared. The next moment he heard a soft chuckle behind him, and looking round he noticed a large white owl perched upon a bush hard by.

"He had you that time," said the owl; "why ever did you look down at the shoes?

The safest way to make sure of the fairies' cobbler is to steal up from behind and catch hold of him, and should he seem unwilling to grant your request you have but to hold him over running water, and he will give you all you ask."

"I will remember your good advice another time," said the apprentice, and he went further into the wood. Now after a while he heard the sound of a waterfall, and came upon yet another glade that lay all silvered in the light of the moon, and he was just debating within himself whether this were not a good place in which to spend the night, when for the third time he caught sight of the fairies' cobbler, seated upon a toadstool. Softly he crept up behind him, and took hold of the mannikin firmly by the lappets of his green coat.

"You shall not escape me again," said he.

"That is as may be," quoth the fairies' cobbler morosely; "pray what reason is there that I should teach the tricks of my trade to a mortal?"

"We shall see about that," said the apprentice, "for if I am not mistaken there is a waterfall close at hand." And with the mannikin under his arm he made his way

among the trees till he came to where the cascade ran white over the rocks. Then the fairies' cobbler began to utter small, shrill cries of protest.

"Come away! Come away!" he cried, piteously, as the apprentice held him over the foaming torrent, "only take me back into the glade, and I will teach you all I know."

Now the apprentice knew that the fairies are no promise-breakers, so he carried the little green mannikin back into the glade, and all that night the fairies' cobbler taught him the utmost that may be known about the art of making and mending shoes. Therefore as soon as the sun rose, the newly-made cobbler said to the mannikin, "I am truly grateful for what you have taught me, and if there be any favour which a poor craftsman like myself can do to one of the Good People, I pray you tell it me."

"There is one favour then which I would ask of you," the fairies' cobbler made reply; "promise me that you will never break off any blackthorn or bring it into your house, for it is our tree, and we are offended when it is tampered with." This the cobbler promised faithfully, and when he had once more thanked

the little green man, he went upon his way.

After some days' journey he came to a great city, and here he remained and worked at his craft. It was not long before he discovered that it was in this city that the princess's parents ruled as king and queen, and he soon learnt from the talk of the people about him, that the fairies were still wreaking their vengeance on the palace. Only the other day, said the gossips, the king and the queen had made ready to receive the ambassador of a foreign prince, but when the court entered the throne-room in state, all the wreaths and garlands with which it had been festooned were torn down, withered, and trampled upon. As soon as he heard this, the cobbler hastened to the palace, and begged for an audience from the king, but the haughty servants to whom he addressed himself refused admission to so humble a suitor, and the cobbler had to return to his cobbling, and bide his time till a better opportunity should offer.

All this while the princess had remained behind in the shepherd's cottage. The good man and his wife treated her as a daughter, and even the old crone seemed glad of her company,

and loved to finger with her palsied hands the princess's beautiful embroidered cloak and sparkling gems, and more especially she fancied a certain jewelled cross that the king's daughter wore about her neck. "Keep it, good mother, since it pleases you," said the kind-hearted princess one day, and she laid it in the old woman's lap, who after that would sit contented by the hour, counting the stones and holding them up to the light.

Now among the mountains in the neighbourhood of the cottage lay a deep and lonely tarn, where waterfowl made their nests, and bulrushes grew in profusion, and often the princess would go and gather these rushes, which she plaited into mats and baskets and sold in the hamlets near by. One day when she was thus picking rushes by the lakeside, she heard a plashing close at hand, and looking up she saw a beautiful black horse standing knee-deep in the water, gazing at her intently. At first she was frightened, but since the creature seemed gentle and harmless she soon regained courage, and when it waded out of the water and came and stood beside her, she began to fondle it and to stroke its glossy mane. After that the beautiful black steed came to greet her every

time that she went to the tarn, but when she spoke of it to the shepherd, he said that he had heard tell of no riderless horse in those parts.

One evening when autumn was drawing on, the shepherd and his wife were absent at a fair in one of the neighbouring villages, but the princess had remained at home with the old grandmother and sat spinning in the firelight.

"Daughter, what ails you?" asked the crone from her corner by the hearth, for she had heard the princess draw a deep, sad sigh.

"I am troubled for my parents' sake," replied the king's daughter; "would that I knew the cause of ill-will which the fairies have against them, and how they might be appeased."

"Samhain," muttered the old woman, "Samhain."

"What is the meaning of Samhain?" asked the princess, but the crone had fallen silent again, and nothing more was to be got out of her. Then the princess went and stood in the doorway, watching for the return of the shepherd and his wife, for it was growing late, and as she stood there the nightwind hurried past her.

"O wind," said the princess, "you are the greatest of all travellers, therefore if you know

it, tell a forlorn king's daughter what is meant by Samhain."

"Samhain is the feast of All Fairies," said the wind.

"And when do they keep it?" asked the princess.

"On All Hallows' E'en," the wind made answer.

"And where do they keep it?" asked the princess.

"In the brown bog country," said the wind, "where you may see a myriad pools, and each pool bathes one star." And when he had said that he sped away, for the wind is ever in haste.

Therefore as soon as the shepherd and his wife returned, the princess told them that she could remain with them no longer, but must set out upon her quest, and though they were loath to part with her, the good people let her go. So the next morning she bade them farewell, and as she went along the road that led to the mountain tarn, the beautiful black horse came trotting to meet her.

"It may be that I shall have far to go," said the princess, "and that this gallant horse will consent to carry me." So she mounted upon

its back and rode onwards, but when they reached the tarn the black horse plunged straightway into the ice-cold water, and began to swim across, and as soon as it gained the centre of the lake, it dived under. Then the princess cried out and struggled, and the black horse threw her, and in that moment she knew that it was no real horse at all, but a kelpie, a wicked water-sprite that assumes at times the form of a horse.

"All the summer through have I loved and watched you, king's daughter," said the kelpie, as he stood before her in his proper shape, "and now you must live with me in my palace, and be my wife."

Pearly white and very fair to see was the palace of the water-kelpie, with its towers and minarets, and a great white dome in the midst, and within, the walls were hung with iridescent tapestries. Here the princess was held a prisoner, and day after day she would sit under the magical milk-white dome, and weep till she had no more tears to shed. But wed the water-kelpie she would not. Her happiest hours were when he left her to roam the hills under the shape of the black horse, and then she would pace to and fro in her beautiful

prison-house and call to mind the peaceful days in the shepherd's cottage, and the young apprentice whom in her secret heart she loved, though because she was a king's daughter she was too proud to own it to anybody but herself.

Meanwhile the cobbler had won for himself a great reputation by his skill in shoe-making, for those who wore his shoes could walk for leagues or dance for whole nights together without growing tired, so that before long his fame reached the ears of the king, who summoned him to the palace. Now, as soon as the cobbler found himself in the presence of the king and queen, he made haste to tell them of his meeting with the princess, and of what the old crone had told them.

"It may be as you say," said the king, "and glad indeed should I be to think that my child is no witch, but only dowered above other mortals, for so great is my fear of witchcraft that I would sooner have my palace pillaged from end to end than suffer any about me who have eyes for uncanny sights."

"I fear we have done our daughter a great wrong," said the queen sorrowfully, "and none of us knows the cause of the fairies' displeasure, nor the remedy for it. We have called in the

Prime Minister, and the Lord High Chamberlain, and the Keeper of the Great Seal, and the Lords and Ladies of the Bedchamber, but they are all utterly at a loss."

Then an idea came to the cobbler. "Madam," said he, "was there by chance any blackthorn brought into the palace last spring?"

"I do not know," replied the queen, "but it shall be inquired into."

So the entire court and household were assembled, and a strict inquiry was made. Then it was that the lowest scullery-maid in the royal kitchen confessed that she had broken off a spray from a blackthorn hedge in the foregoing spring, and had placed it in her attic room. So the king, at the cobbler's advice, published a proclamation, forbidding the breaking of blackthorn throughout the realm, but to the cobbler himself he said; "Do you go and fetch my daughter back, for we will receive her with due honour, and if she be willing you shall have her hand in marriage. As for the waiting-woman who accused her to me, she shall be dismissed the kingdom."

Then the cobbler set out and made his way back to the shepherd's cottage, but when he reached it the good man and his wife told him

of how the princess had left them, and that they had had no tidings of her since. "But if you are in search of her," said the shepherd's wife, "take with you this jewelled cross and restore it to her, for she gave it to the old grand-dame who is now dead, and it is not ours that we should keep it." So the cobbler took the cross, and continued his journey.

Now as he passed by the lonely tarn he heard a voice singing, and recognised that same plaintive refrain which the princess had sung when first he met her on the hillside.

"Alas! Alas!" he cried aloud, "my dear lady is drowned in this desolate pool."

"Would that I were, good friend," the princess's voice made answer, "it had been better than this my sad captivity, for I am in the power of a wicked water-kelpie who woos me for his wife."

When he heard these words, the cobbler fell to thinking how he might deliver his princess from her sorrowful fate, and soon he bethought him of the jewelled cross. This he took and flung it far into the tarn, and as the saving sign touched the surface the evil, wine-dark water began to seethe and boil in its depths, and the stately pearl-white palace of the kelpie

broke up and dissolved upon the instant. So the princess was released and came forth from the tarn. Then the cobbler hastened to tell her of the discovery of the blackthorn, and of how he had come to bring her home to her parents.

"Tell me first," said she, "what day it is, for I have lost all count of time."

"It is All Hallows' E'en," replied the cobbler.

At that the princess began to lament bitterly, for she feared lest she might be too late to reach the bog country where the fairies would keep their feast.

"Do not be sorrowful, princess," replied the cobbler, "I promise you we shall both see Samhain kept to-night, and to-morrow I will restore you to your home."

"How is that to be?" asked she.

"I will make shoes of swiftness," said the cobbler, "which will carry us more fleetly than the swallows." And immediately he set to work and made her a pair of fairy shoes, and next he began making a pair for himself. But while he was still working at the second shoe, there came a sound of hoof-beats far away.

"O hasten, hasten!" cried the princess,

wringing her hands, "for the kelpie is returning." Nearer and nearer drew the sound of the thundering hoofs upon the road, faster and faster stitched the cobbler.

"O make haste, make haste!" cried the princess; "see, he is in sight!" Fleetly down the steep hillside the black horse came galloping, with streaming mane and glaring eyes.

"We are lost!" cried the princess, and indeed the horse was already upon them, and had caught the fringe of her cloak in its mouth. But in that same instant the cobbler slipped on his second shoe, and he and the princess sped away together like birds upon the wing. But the embroidered cloak they left behind between the horse's teeth.

Over land and ocean they went, yet felt no weariness, and at nightfall they reached the brown bog country, studded with innumerable pools, and every pool bathed a star. The moon was rising, and from all the four winds the fairies came trooping, elves and gnomes and pixies, brownies and hobgoblins, with the fairy queen and her retinue in their midst, and at a little distance the cobbler and the princess stood and watched them assemble. At last one dainty elf came towards them, in dress of

pearly gossamer, and in her yellow hair a wreath of starry white flowers, such as you may see for yourself on the window-pane any frosty day.

"I owe you thanks for many a past kindness," said she to the cobbler.

"Yet I have never seen you till this moment, elf lady," he replied.

"Are you so sure of that?" laughed she; "look well, look well at my eyes." Then the cobbler looked long and earnestly, and indeed they were wondrous eyes, green and glimmering, nor were they like the eyes of any mortal.

"Every hundred years," said the elf, "we fairies must take the shape of some beast or bird or fish for the space of a year and a day, and if we die during that time we perish, for we have no souls. Now I was the cobbler's yellow cat when my turn came, and you befriended me in my exile. But follow me, and I will take you to the fairy queen, that you may tell her on what errand you are come to-night."

Then she led them through a throng of fairies, amongst whom the cobbler recognised his enemy the boggart, and the princess the three fairies who had filched the almond

blossom, and lured away the peacock, and broken the flax. Presently they reached the steps of the elfin throne, and here both knelt to the fairy queen.

"For what purpose have you sought us out?" asked she.

"I come to appease your displeasure, greatest of all queens," replied the princess, "for in the spring time a spray of blackthorn was heedlessly broken and brought into our palace, and since that day the fairies have borne us a grudge. How may we turn away their anger?"

"Say to the king your father, and to the queen your mother," the fairy queen made answer, "that if at the next full moon they will deliver up their throne-room to us for an elfin bridal, we shall bear them ill-will no longer, for my people love nothing better than to feast and make merry in a human dwelling." Then the queen made them sit down upon the steps of the throne, and commanded that the revels should begin.

"You have done me credit, Master Apprentice," piped a voice at the cobbler's elbow, as a train of fairies swept past, and looking round he caught sight of the little green man, who nodded and smiled at him. But when

the cobbler and the princess had watched the dancing till the moon rode high in the heavens, the fairy queen laid a hand upon both their heads, and soon a great drowsiness overcame them. Soundly they slept, and when they woke it was to find themselves stretched upon a patch of heather, while all around them the brown bog country lay very still in the light of the paling stars. Then they rose and made haste homewards, and when they reached the palace there were great rejoicings to welcome them back; the king and queen received their daughter with much affection, and besought her pardon for the wrong they had done her, and when the cobbler made bold to ask her hand in marriage, she willingly consented.

So the wedding was celebrated with great pomp and splendour; the city saw nothing but festivities and illuminations for seven days and seven nights, and from far and near the crowds poured in to share in the merry-making. Amongst these came the shepherd and his wife, and the cobbler's former master, and upon all three the bride and bridegroom showered gifts and benefits.

Now the night after the wedding it was full moon, so the throne-room was garlanded with

fresh flowers, and left to the fairies till cock-crow. None saw them come nor go, but in the morning there was found a little golden casket, wrought by the dwarf goldsmiths of the elfin court, and inside the casket was a clump of four-leaved clover. This was the fairy queen's wedding present, and the bridal couple planted it below their window, and it grew and throve, and brought them untold happiness and good fortune."

Philomène had some difficulty in making out the last word of the story, for Master Mustard-seed had half turned it into a trill, and began singing at the top of his voice. The school-room door opened; the doctor had come home.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH THE HEROINE MAKES THE FIRST USE OF HER LATCHKEY

It was about this time that Philomène first began to remark a change in her father. He was not at any time a man of many words, but he now became unusually silent even for him. He was not unkind to his little girl, but he saw less of her, and gave her only half his attention when she spoke to him. She suffered acutely from his altered manner, but was far too loyal to confide her trouble to either of her fairy friends, let alone to Nurse or Miss Mills. Once when writing to her godmother, who was abroad at the time, she put at the end of the letter; "*P.S.*—I wish I had a mother." But she had no very clear idea as to how a mother would have mended matters, and Isolde in her answer did not refer to the postscript.

It was in these days, when her father called her "little Miss Muffet" less often than formerly, that Philomène grew doubly glad of the key

in the savings-box and of the bird-cage in the schoolroom. Master Mustardseed was somewhat of a gossip, and told her many stories about the children to whom the fairy queen stands sponsor, for Titania is very fond of children, though she has none of her own. Then he would tell her all that he had seen in the course of his flight through the air astride of a shooting-star; he would sing to her, till she knew it by heart, the serenade piped by a bulrush who was fast fading for love of an ivory white moth that used to settle on a reed close by, but never came to him. Master Mustardseed had been asleep at the time, curled up inside a yellow waterlily on a pond, having asked a friendly frog to sway the stalk of the lily gently to and fro, so as to produce a drowsy rocking motion. The bulrush's lovesong, however, had waked him up, and having a good musical memory he had learnt it then and there.

The recent wet weather had altogether prevented Philomène from going into the garden, so that May with its lilac was gone, and June with its roses had come, before she had her first opportunity of letting herself into Sweet William's house by means of her own latchkey. On entering she saw that the room was empty

but for the tom-tit, who was trying, it must be confessed without much success, to reduce it to order. The catkin tapestry had to be taken down, shaken, beaten, and rehung; the tree-stump cupboard had been emptied, and its contents littered the mushroom table, while the tom-tit complained that the things had been so closely packed inside it, that it was far easier to take them out than to make them fit in again after they had been dusted.

"I wish he would have a sparrow in by the day," wailed the tom-tit; "it's more than I can manage single-handed." So Philomène comforted and helped him as best she could, and by the time Sweet William returned, the room was as neat as a new pin, and a great deal bonnier. It was after the tom-tit had got leave to fly away, that Philomène asked if there had been any news of the grasshopper lately.

"Nothing much," replied Sweet William; "he is still trying to reach the sun in high hops, and his friend the dial has given him up as a bad job. Well, and has Master Mustardseed been making himself agreeable? Are you any less bored than you used to be? Is the schoolroom

quite as commonplace as you were pleased at one time to imagine ? "

Philomène blushed. " I am afraid you must have thought me discontented," she said, humbly; " but indeed I am not at all bored any longer. How should I be, with Master Mustardseed to tell me stories whenever we are alone together ? And, oh, you can't think what lovely stories they are ! He began with one about a poor apprentice who was taught his trade by the fairies' own cobbler, and in the end he married a princess."

" Dear me ! how enthusiastic we are, to be sure," remarked Sweet William, with his head in the air; " you talk as though there were nobody who could tell stories but Master Mustardseed, which is very far from being the case."

" Oh, I know you could tell beautiful stories too, if you tried," said Philomène hastily, " and indeed I wish you would, for there is nothing I should like better."

" Very well," said Sweet William, " but I'm afraid my story hasn't a princess in it, only a goose-girl who married a troll."

" Is it a true story ? " asked Philomène.

" I daresay it's true enough as far as it goes,"

replied Sweet William, and Philomène wondered how far it went.

"And where did the troll live?" she asked again.

"He lived at home," retorted Sweet William; "and really you must not ask so many questions; it quite puts me off."

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH SWEET WILLIAM TELLS A STORY

"THERE was once a goose-girl named Kora, who used to herd her master's geese in a certain field. Now at one end of this field there was a grassy mound, inside which lived a very rich and wicked troll, who came every day to his doorway to watch the goose-girl as she sat in the shadow of a hollow tree, knitting and singing, and minding her geese. "She is so cheerful and industrious," said he to himself, "that doubtless she would make a very good wife."

But one day when he stood at his threshold to look at her, he saw that she had let her knitting fall into her lap, and that instead of singing, she was weeping bitterly. Very cautiously he crept up behind her, and touched her gently on the arm. Kora started and screamed when she caught sight of the troll, for he was ugly and misshapen, and had an uncommonly large head.

"Why are you crying, my girl?" he asked.

"Because one of my geese has strayed," said she, "and I have sought for it till I am tired out, and I know that my master will be very angry with me."

"That is soon mended," replied the troll, "for in my house I have a magic crystal, which tells me where I may find all lost and missing things. Come with me, pretty maid, and I will see what I can do for you."

So Kora followed him joyfully into the little house within the knoll, and looked with great curiosity at the wonderful crystal. She noticed that it bore the following inscription:—

> "In all the world there is but one spot,
> Unknown to men, by fays forgot,
> Wherein my power availeth not."

But she did not pay much attention to the words at the time.

"I can see your goose already," cried the troll, as he peered into the crystal; "it has strayed as far as the sand dunes."

"Then I must go and seek it immediately," replied Kora, "and I thank you most heartily for your courtesy."

"Not so fast, not so fast," the troll made

answer, catching her by the arm; "you are pretty and neat-fingered, my girl, and have a sweet voice. You shall stay and keep house for me, and be my wife."

Kora protested with tears and cries and wringing of hands, but it was all to no purpose; so she pretended to resign herself to her lot, though in reality she never ceased planning how she might escape from it. Presently an idea came to her, and one day, instead of busying herself about the house as usual, she remained seated by the hearth, her head in her hands, the picture of dejection.

"What is the matter now?" demanded the troll.

"The matter!" cried Kora, with a great show of indignation; "when you have never so much as given me a wedding-ring! When men take wives in the upper world, they give them golden wedding-rings in token of their troth."

"Is that all?" said the troll. "Dry your eyes then, my love, for you shall soon have rings in plenty."

So saying he went into his own private closet, a dark little room at the back of the house, and presently returned laden with sacks

and caskets, all full of gold and silver, jewels and trinkets. Kora began trying on one ring after another, but none of them seemed to please her, and at last she turned away with a gesture of impatience.

"These are not the right sort," said she scornfully, "for they are all set with precious stones, while a real wedding-ring is only a plain gold circlet. I will not do another stroke of work about the house till you have brought me a proper wedding-ring."

"I will go to the goldsmith and get you one, my love," said her husband, and he set out that same day.

No sooner, however, had Kora watched him out of sight, than she ran into the wood that skirted the meadow, and kept on running till she was so tired and out of breath that she had to sit down and rest. Then she noticed that something underground was shovelling up the earth at her feet, throwing it about in all directions. She expected to see a mole emerge, but when the creature did at last appear it proved to be a little brown gnome, with a sack flung across his shoulder.

"Tell me, good gnome," cried Kora, "how I may escape from my husband the troll. He

has a magic crystal by means of which he is able to find all lost and missing things, so that I cannot think of a safe enough hiding-place."

"You must take another shape," replied the gnome, and he turned her into a crystal that twinkled on the edge of a jagged rock.

When the troll came home and missed his wife, he was very angry, and went straight to his magic crystal; and there, sure enough, he not only saw the sparkle in the rock, but also recognised his wife under her assumed shape. Immediately he hurried into the wood, carrying a hammer, and having broken away the splinter of rock, he took it home in triumph, and no sooner had he crossed his own threshold than his wife stood before him. After that the troll treated her very hardly, and Kora hated him more than ever.

Now one day the troll was going fishing, and this time he said to his wife: "You shall play me no second trick, madam; I will lock you in till I come back." So saying he turned the key upon her, and went his way. But Kora did not despair. She hurried into her husband's private closet, and took the keys of all the various caskets in which he kept his treasure. Then with trembling hands she tried them one

"PRESENTLY AN ELF CAME PAST HER, RIDING ON A LIZARD"

by one in the lock of the door, and as good luck would have it, the last key fitted. The next thing she did was to try to destroy the magic crystal. She dashed it on to the floor and against the wall, but finding that she could not break it, she went and hid it inside the hollow tree in the field, beneath which in former days she had been wont to sit and watch her geese. Then she fled into the forest, and ran as fast and as far as she could. Presently an elf came past her, riding on a lizard.

"Tell me, kind elf," said she, "how I may escape from the cruel troll, my husband, for I have hidden his magic crystal which tells him where to find all lost and missing things."

"I will do the best I can for you," replied the elf, and turning Kora into a dockleaf by the brook, he rode on.

When the troll returned home from his fishing, and found that his wife had escaped a second time, he was much enraged, and made his way at once to the place where he kept his crystal. But when he saw that this had also disappeared, he was in a greater rage than ever, and began to hunt for it all over the house. At last he thought of the hollow tree, and there, inside

the trunk, and smothered in dry leaves and moss, he found his missing talisman. No sooner had he looked into it, than he saw the dockleaf growing by the brook, and once more recognised his wife. Immediately he went into the wood, and having picked the dockleaf, he took it home in triumph, and when he had crossed his own threshold his wife stood before him. After that he treated her yet more hardly, and Kora hated him even more than before.

Now it is customary that trolls should be the money-lenders of mighty kings, and Kora's husband had many a time lent gold and silver and treasure of all sorts to a certain avaricious king, who loved wealth above everything, and oppressed his people with unendurable imposts. It so happened that just at this time the troll received an urgent message from this king, entreating him for a large sum of money. So he called his wife to him, and said to her, "I must now go on a journey which will last several days, and I will take my crystal with me, so that should you try to escape from me again, I shall be able to discover your hiding-place in a trice. Bear this in mind, wife, and let me have no more of these follies."

For some time after she was left alone, Kora made no further attempt at escape. She did nothing but sit and brood over her troubles, and say to herself that there was no way out of them, till she suddenly called to mind the words of the inscription on the crystal, and understood that there must be just one country under the sun where she would be safe from her husband's pursuit.

"I will try to find it," said she, "it is the one chance left me." And in this forlorn hope she went for the third time into the wood. Far, far she went, through forest and field and heath, till at last she was obliged to sit down by the roadside and rest. It had begun to rain, and dusk was falling. Kora was worn out with her wanderings, and shed many tears. All at once she felt a hand upon her shoulder. At first she started and cried out, believing that it was the troll, but then she saw that it was only an old crone with bent back and grizzled hair, leaning upon a stick.

"Daughter," said the old woman, "what is your trouble?"

"I am escaping from my husband, the troll," said Kora, "and I am afraid lest he should find me by looking into his magic crystal. I

am in search of an unknown land where the crystal has no power."

"You seem tired out," said the old crone kindly, "come with me, for I can at least offer you shelter."

Kora thanked her earnestly, and they walked on together. Heather and bracken stretched to either side of them for mile upon mile, the last curlew had gone to rest, and it was very still and eerie on the lonely moor. Kora looked to right and to left, hoping to catch sight of a shepherd's cottage, or at least of some hovel which might prove to be the old woman's home, but she could see nothing save certain giant boulders scattered here and there upon the heath. What then was her surprise when the old crone hobbled up to the largest of these, and struck it with her stick. Immediately the door was opened by a tabby cat.

"You are late, mistress," said he.

"I have brought a guest," replied the old woman, "so you must all bestir yourselves." Then she led Kora into a snug little room, where a bright fire of peat blazed invitingly on the hearth.

"First you must eat and sleep," said she, "and to-morrow you shall tell me of your

trouble. I am a Wise Woman, and may be able to help you."

Kora sank down by the fireside, too weary to make any protest. She stretched out her cold hands to the ruddy glow, and began to dry her wet dress and hood. Meanwhile the Wise Woman's servants were busy preparing the evening meal, which was soon ready. A black cat served the soup and a white cat the fish, a grey cat the joint and a tortoiseshell cat the sweets. Then a sandy cat lit a taper and lighted her to her room, where she soon fell sound asleep.

When the morning came, Kora at once sought out the Wise Woman, told her her whole story, and begged for advice.

"The unknown country to which no man has found the way," replied the Wise Woman, "is the country whither the cuckoos go in winter, nor do I myself know the way, but if you will consent to be turned into a cuckoo, you will at once be able to find it."

Rather than fall again into her husband's hands, Kora willingly agreed, and the Wise Woman thereupon, with a wave of her stick, changed her into a cuckoo, which spread its wings and flew away, far across the pathless sea.

The troll meanwhile felt so sure that his wife would not again try to escape, that several days passed before he thought it necessary to look into the magic crystal. Great was his dismay, therefore, when he did at last look into it, to see nothing but a blank. Never before had it failed him. He hurried home with all speed, and finding his house deserted, he at once resolved to set out in pursuit of Kora. But since his heart was in his treasure, he would not start before he had gathered together as much as he could possibly carry with him, and had loaded it upon his back. He travelled a long way, through forest and field and heath, till at last he came to the shores of a great ocean. Here he took a boat, and began paddling himself out to sea, but the sack of gold proved so heavy that the boat sank, and the troll was drowned.

But Kora reached the unknown land in safety, and married the king of the cuckoos, with whom she lived in great happiness and contentment, and they reigned together over the most beautiful country in all the world."

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH THE HEROINE HAS A BIRTHDAY

As the weather brightened and warmed into midsummer, most of Philomène's free time was spent in the garden, and consequently with Sweet William.

It was on a morning towards the end of June that she awoke with the delightful sensation that her birthday had come at last. Had she not waited a whole year for it? By her plate at breakfast time lay a big box of wild flowers, sent by the gardener's wife at the Cushats. Godmother had taught her the names of all sorts of flowers during her last summer holidays, so that she recognised almost all in the box, but a certain little white, blue and red pyramid was quite a stranger to her; she therefore christened it "N. or M.," like the person in the Catechism, and N. or M. it remained to her ever afterwards, though later she knew it to be a kind of wild orchid. The doctor gave her a sketch-book and a whole box full of beautiful

new pencils, and Miss Mills a book called "Legends from River and Mountain."

"I haven't a notion what it's about," she said, apologetically, "but I thought from the title that you might take to it, and it was written by a queen."

"A real queen!" cried Philomène, "as real as Marie Antoinette, or Mary, Queen of Scots?"

"Quite as real," replied Miss Mills, laughing, "and now you must look at the beautiful pincushion that Nurse has made for you. Won't it look nice on your dressing-table?"

"Yes, and I will put the date of my birthday on it in pins," said Philomène, but Nurse shook her head.

"I wouldn't put pins into it, Miss, if I were you," she said, reproachfully, "that would spoil it;" and Philomène with her arms about the old woman promised, "I won't, Nursie dear, indeed I never will."

The morning of the birthday was blissfully spent in the making of toffee, a rather hot occupation for June, no doubt, but Philomène's wishes were law throughout that day. It did not turn out to be nice toffee when made, but it was not wasted, for Lilian Augusta used it to light the kitchen fire, and said it was as

good as any patent fire-lighter. At dinner Philomène was allowed to carve the chicken herself, though her carving proved as unsuccessful as her cookery. "But as it's my birthday I can have the liver!" she announced, triumphantly, "and I do know where to find that—it is somewhere under its arms."

All that afternoon Philomène sat sketching busily or reading in her new story-book, nor did she forget before putting it away to make a note both of its title, and of the names of its author and publisher, in a little red leather pocket-book kept for that purpose. This custom had been introduced by Godmother.

"If you are at all like me," Isolde had said, "you will be very sorry as you grow older to find that some of the dearest books of your childhood have been thrown away, or given away, with or without your knowledge. Your wise elders will say, 'She is getting too old now ever to want to read this or that again,' and they will forget that just now you may be neither young enough or old enough for the book, but that in a few more years you will begin to grow younger again and want to read it, and then it will be too late to recover it. You will remember the exact colour of the

binding, and how your favourite story in it began half way down on the right-hand page, but you will not remember who wrote it or who printed it. Perhaps you will not even remember the name of the book, and if you want it back again, you cannot very well write to a shop and say, 'Dear Sirs, please send me a thin green book with a picture of a lizard as the frontispiece, and the last story but one is the nicest of all. Yours faithfully—' So here is a little pocket-book, and I want you to make a note of the titles of all the books you are fond of, with the names of their authors and publishers, and even if you find it a bother now and then to remember to write them down, I think you will be glad of it later on."

Just as Philomène was going to bed, a letter from Godmother arrived.

"My own little cushat," wrote Isolde, "I am afraid you will have to wait a little while before you can have your birthday present, for it is a trap and a white donkey, and though you had better leave them at the Cushats as parlour boarders when you are in London, they are to be your very own all the same. I want you to come and stay with me, my little bird, for July and August and part of September.

You and I will get on very well together in the summer, I hope, and take out the new white Neddie for lots of drives. We shall have a great deal to tell each other when we meet, but I have no time for more now. Goodbye, my bairnie. Love and all good wishes from Godmother."

It was when Philomène looked out of her bedroom window on the morning of the day following her birthday, that she noticed a large fairy ring on the lawn, and felt very much flattered, for by it she knew that the fairies had not forgotten the occasion, but had given a ball in her honour.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE HEROINE IS GIVEN A LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

During the remaining days of that gladsome rose-red June, Philomène went about the house with a face as glad as any sunbeam and as rosy as any flower. Nurse thought that the prospect of riding in a hay-cart and digging in the sand with a new spade sufficiently accounted for these radiant looks, but though the haystacks loomed large, they loomed only in the background—it was Godmother's figure which occupied the foreground.

The plan cast only one shadow. Philomène felt very sorry at having to leave Master Mustardseed and Sweet William, and when the day for packing arrived, she had tears in her eyes as she opened the cage-door, and put in her hand so that the canary might perch upon her wrist. Unhappily Nurse was present, so Philomène could only kiss the canary's green head tenderly, and whisper, " It isn't for

so very long, dear," before she again closed the cage-door. As for Queen Mab, she put a soft padded paw into her mistress's hand, and rubbed a soft whiskered face against her mistress's arm, as who should say, " Goodbye, and don't get too fond of any other pussycats."

Then Philomène went into the garden and let herself into Sweet William's house. He had been expecting her visit, and held out a lean little brown hand with what was for him an air of unusual condescension.

" Sit down," he said, " you are a good child, and I shall miss you. But we shall meet again in September, I understand. By the way, I have decided to give you a letter of introduction to the fairy agent at the Cushats. The garden must have one, though I do not happen to know him. I don't expect you will see very much of him, for you will not be as lonely there as here, and so much left to yourself. Considering that she isn't a proper fairy godmother, yours seems to do very well by you. Still, it would be nicer for you to have the chance of getting to know another fairy if you could."

All this while Sweet William had been rummaging in his cupboard. He now drew from it a white Japanese anemone, with its

petals tightly shut up. This he handed to Philomène. "Is it the envelope?" she asked, wonderingly.

"No, child," he replied, "it is the letter. I have written all that is necessary on the inside of the petals, and the anemone will open only when you have found the person for whom it is intended." Philomène thanked him, and they took a friendly farewell of each other.

It was Lilian Augusta with whom she travelled to the little country station where Godmother was to meet her. She sat bolt-upright in her corner of the carriage, looking at the daisied fields as they sped by; she watched the miniature carts and horses as they toiled along the road below the level of the train, and her spirits were so high that nothing could chill or damp them, not even the drink concocted by Nurse for the journey, a horrible mixture of tea and milk with far too much sugar in it.

The little station of Wyndham-on-Ferry, at which the travellers presently arrived, was altogether too sleepy for this bustling age. The fiery red geraniums in the station-master's garden nodded drowsily in the hot sun, the solitary porter seemed almost as drowsy as the geraniums, and the only wide-awake

creature about the place was a cock that crowed from a neighbouring farmyard. Outside the station Godmother was waiting with the new trap and the white donkey, and Philomène had soon scrambled up on to the seat beside her.

"O Godmother," she cried, "he really is a dear, with just the same big brown eyes as the donkey in the picture over the schoolroom mantelpiece, and the same long ears laid back."

They had not driven far before the breath of the pinewoods met them, and that sound which is older than all the world beside, the primeval cadence of the league-long surf.

The gate of the Cushats stood open, white and friendly. The pigeons were cooing heart to heart in the woods, and the mingled sweets of heliotrope, rose, and jasmine, streamed out in wordless welcome. The lime-tree outside the bow-window of the drawing-room was casting a tremulous shadow on the lush-green turf of the lawn, and the pale gold of early evening was on the little old gabled house.

The furnishing of Philomène's room was as innocently white and as hopefully green as any snowdrop; there was no carpet on the floor, only some green and white matting in

places. A copy of one of Watts' pictures, that of a knight standing lost in thought beside his white horse, was hanging where Philomène could see it as she lay in bed.

"The knight's horse is very beautiful, Godmother," she murmured just before dropping off to sleep, "but I think I like a white donkey even better." Her hand was in Isolde's, and the shoheen of the night wind in the pinewoods sounded in her ears as the sound of the sea.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH THE HEROINE PRESENTS HER LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

PHILOMÈNE's first day at the Cushats happened to be a Sunday, and after breakfast on the lawn Isolde took her god-daughter to the weekly children's service. These services were short and simple, and the vicar of Wyndham-on-Ferry was acknowledged by everybody to be at his best when addressing children. He was a tall, spare man, with a somewhat stern expression of face, "and what his servant is about is more than I can tell," Nurse had once remarked, "for he has the look of a person who lives on nothing but mince and hot water."

In the side-chapel of the village church hung a copy of an Italian picture, S. Mary Magdalene, black-haired and crimson-robed, and to Philomène the pale sad face, framed in its shadowy tresses, seemed like the face of some sorrowful mermaid. Neither her father nor her godmother had ever insisted upon her attending

drearily long services which could have held no meaning for her, and the result was that she was very fond of going to church. She loved the sweet-voiced bells and the vibrating tones of the organ, the rich colouring of the stained-glass and the stately rhythm of the prayers.

"It just makes me feel like a king's daughter," she had once confided to Isolde, "and do you know, Godmother, I really think I like it better than the theatre, because there is no tiresome clapping to interrupt in the middle, and disturb one, and make one feel every-dayish again all of a sudden."

"What would you like to do, little cushat?" asked Isolde, as the two strolled home together across the fields. "I have some letters that I must write, and I am afraid they will take me till lunch-time."

"I will look at your Granny's big picture Bible first," said Philomène, "and then write to Daddy and play with the pussies, and after that I will go and have a look at the dove-cot."

"There aren't any doves, you know," said Isolde, "I don't particularly want to keep any. There are quite enough in the woods all round."

"Oh, that doesn't matter a bit," said Philomène, "one can always pretend."

So Godmother settled herself to write on the verandah, and Philomène brought out the Bible. It was a very bulky book, for it contained not only the Old and New Testaments, but the Old and New Testament Apocryphas as well. Judging from the dog's-eared pages thereabouts, it would appear that Godmother's Granny had looked oftenest at the picture of Jacob blessing his twelve sons from a four-poster bed, and at another of the Last Judgment, the grouping of which suggested nothing so much as a prize-giving. But Philomène preferred Martha, cumbered with a pepper-pot and a soup-tureen, because she reminded her of Lilian Augusta, and Pharaoh's daughter with the rosettes on her shoes, and best of all she liked S. Anne by the laurel-bush, complaining to the sparrow in its nest that she had no child. Again and again had Philomène peeped over the edge of that nest to count the eggs, but the mother bird spread wide its brooding wings, and baffled her curiosity.

As soon as Philomène had had a look at her favourite pictures, she put away the book and wrote two whole sheets to her father. After that she began to play with Don Whiskerandos, Isolde's black Persian, who

sat blinking in the sun at his mistress's feet. Occasionally he roused himself sufficiently to wash his front paws, which were like velvet tassels for softness, but for the rest he was sleepy and undemonstrative. Philomène had christened him Dives, because he fared sumptuously every day and took no notice of his neighbours, and she soon gave up trying to play with him, and went in search of Lazarus, the gingery stable cat. Lazarus was certainly as plain and as under-bred as it is possible for a cat to be, but as Philomène always loved anything which other people did not consider it worth their while to love, his very gingeriness and the bullet shape of his head cried out to her for affection.

By the time Lazarus had had his full share of attention, the bell rang for luncheon on the verandah, and when lunch was over, Isolde gave herself up to her godchild. She swung her untiringly in the swing between the two horse-chestnut trees, she tucked her up in the hammock and read to her, they played battledore and shuttlecock together on the lawn, and at tea-time retreated to the shadow of a giant haystack in a field close by, to eat home-made scones and strawberries and cream.

It was here that the vicar found them. He was no stranger to Philomène, for he often dropped in at the Cushats on a Sunday afternoon, and she was not shy with him, but as soon as he and her godmother began talking politics, she thought it was about time for the dove-cot. As she left the field and came back into the garden, it occurred to her that it might be as well to take with her Sweet William's letter of introduction. The tall silver savings-box stood on the dressing-table in her room, and inside were the latchkey and the anemone. With the flower in her hand she hurried towards the disused dove-cot, and upon reaching it was very much surprised by a slight flutter of wings from inside it. She put her hand into one of the pigeon-holes, and something brushed past it and flew out into the open. Could it be a dove after all? she wondered. But then she saw that the anemone was full blown, and in another minute she became aware of a little creature perched upon the dove-cot. It was a fairy; who but a fairy could have had such glistering wings, and worn a dress of tussore-coloured silk from a caterpillar's cocoon? The elf rather reminded Philomène of Master Mustardseed, for she had small, bright eyes

like those of a bird, and her little head was cocked on one side as she sat and looked at the intruder.

"I am very sorry to have disturbed you," began Philomène, "but I had no idea that this was your house. I think I have a letter for you," and so saying she handed the Japanese anemone to the fairy, who buried her face in its petals. When she looked up from the letter, she was smiling kindly.

"Did you have any green ribbons——"

"Yes," interrupted Philomène eagerly, "I did; on my christening robe."

"Ah, that accounts for it," said the elf, still smiling, "and I shall be very glad to do anything I can to amuse you while you are here. I only wish I were not quite so busy, but the grounds are large, very large for the size of the house, and my time is not my own. However, I will do what I can, during the hours when you and your godmother are not together. I do not know Sweet William at all, not even by name, but he has written of you in the most flattering terms. I was asleep just now when you put your hand into my bedroom, and I am sure I ought to feel very grateful to you for waking me up out of my shockingly long noon-day nap,

for I have any amount of work before me, so that I am afraid I cannot be of much service to you this afternoon."

"What is it that you are going to see to?" asked Philomène with interest.

"I am in great difficulties about housing a mole," replied the little agent in a troubled voice, "I let part of the front lawn to him, but the gardener interfered. He is a most tiresome old man."

"Godmother says he doesn't know much about gardening," remarked Philomène, "and I know that whenever I ask him the name of a flower he just goes on muttering, 'What's this we call it now? What's this we call it?' till either I remember it myself, or someone else comes up and tells me. But Godmother keeps him on because he has been here a long time, and I expect the other man and the boy really do all the work. Besides, I once heard her say to my Daddy that the one thing he did understand was grass, and that he makes her lawns as good as any in the county. She seemed quite pleased about it."

The elf nodded her head sagely. "That is just the trouble," she replied, "I mean from the point of view of a land and house-agent.

He is so careful of the lawns that he won't allow any mole to rent them. However, I must see what I can do for my tenant in some out of the way corner. And now I must really say good afternoon, and ask you to put off our next meeting till to-morrow. Oh, by the way though, before I go you had better tell me your name—Sweet William has forgotten to mention it."

"My name is Philomène, Philomène Isolde," said the little girl, "and please, what is yours?"

"Speedwell," answered the other, and she spread her wings, nodded a friendly good-bye, and flew away. Philomène stood watching her flight till the glittering wings disappeared behind the rosemary hedge, after which she made her way to the wilderness of currant and gooseberry bushes behind the house. Here stood a tub, and a see-saw, and a shed, but before she had made up her mind whether to go to sea in the tub, or turn the shed into a Red Indian wigwam, her attention was distracted by what sounded like the twittering of two birds at once in a currant bush near by.

"And yet it doesn't sound quite like an ordinary bird either," thought Philomène, and she went close up to the bush. One bird there

certainly was, perched on a leafy twig and twittering shrilly, but it was Speedwell who was sitting upon another branch, and arguing with the bird. As Philomène came up both stopped talking, seemingly quite out of breath.

"What have you done with the letter?" asked Philomène smiling, "did you throw it away when you started house-hunting for the mole?"

The elf cocked her head on one side, and looked up with small bright eyes; her shimmering wings were folded, and her little green shoes peeped from beneath her dress of tussore-coloured silk. "I do not understand you," said she, "I don't even know who you are. Oh, yes, I do though, you must be the little girl who was to arrive yesterday; the stable cat told me you were expected. But we have not met till this moment."

"But I was speaking to you only a few minutes ago at the dove-cot, and I gave you Sweet William's letter of introduction!" exclaimed Philomène in amazement.

The elf laughed. "It must have been my twin sister whom you saw just now," said she, "I am Spirea. However, I don't wonder at

your mistake, for when we were babies and cradled in the same pod, our own mother did not know us apart. We will settle about your lease some other time," she added, turning to the bird, who had been preening his feathers to conceal his annoyance at the interruption, "and you had better not mention it to the people at the Rookery till you hear something more definite from me. Now I am at your disposal," she continued to Philomène, "where shall we go? To the swing? You might sit in it, and I could talk to you from a mossy settee between the roots of one of the horse-chestnuts."

The place was soon reached, and the two remained chatting there very pleasantly, till Philomène thought it must be getting late, and that she ought to find out if her godmother intended to go to evensong; so she said good-night to Spirea, who promised to see her again the following day.

Isolde was still sitting in the hayfield, and the vicar stood before her, abusing modern operas. "What dreadfully dull things they do talk about," thought Philomène, "when they might have been making friends with twin fairies all this time! But perhaps they

couldn't, even if they wanted to, not without the green ribbons."

"You're fond of music, aren't you?" asked the vicar, sitting down and drawing Philomène towards him into the lengthening shade of the hayrick. Philomène nodded.

"Yes," she replied, "some music. I don't like Lilian Augusta's hymns much, but I do like it when Godmother sits by herself at the spinet and sings:

> 'I would I were on yonder hill,
> 'Tis there I'd sit and cry my fill,
> Till every tear should turn a mill.'"

Isolde blushed. "It is only a little Irish song," she explained in some confusion, "a very plaintive little love-song; I believe Hændel is supposed to have said that he would rather have written that one air than the whole of the 'Messiah.'"

"Are you going to church, Godmother?" asked Philomène, as she lay full length on the hot grass, looking up at the clouds that were drifting white, fleecy, and unshepherded, across their native pastures, and asking herself whether in the long run she would prefer blue fields to green.

"I think so," said Isolde, and she got up as she spoke.

"Then I will too," said Philomène, "and of course you will come anyhow, because you have to," she added in her serious, understanding way to the vicar. He laughed good-humouredly, and walked by her side, swinging his cane, and repeating half aloud as he went:

> "The sun, above the mountain's head,
> A freshening lustre mellow
> Through all the long green fields has spread,
> His first sweet evening yellow."

"Capital," murmured the tall, gaunt vicar, "the very words for it, the only words for it! 'His first sweet evening yellow' — what wouldn't I give to have written that myself?"

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH GREAT GOOD FORTUNE BEFALLS THE HEROINE

Sweet William had been right when he foretold that Philomène would not see much of the fairy agent at the Cushats, for Isolde devoted herself whole-heartedly to the amusement of her godchild, and the days chased each other in their eagerness to turn into to-morrow, with its fresh succession of walks and talks and drives and picnics. Yet there were of necessity times when Philomène was left to amuse herself, and it was then that Speedwell and Spirea came skimming towards her through the air, or peeped up at her out of the flowers, or hopped down to her from the trees. It was not, however, till August that anything of importance befell.

Philomène was in the stable, feeding the white donkey with sugar, and begging him to talk to her if he could. "If Balaam's donkey talked to him when he was unkind and stupid

and hit it," she reasoned persuasively, "I think the least you can do is to talk to me when I am giving you all this sugar. Of course if you really can't, that is another thing, but I never feel sure of that these days. Oh, you there, Spirea?" The last exclamation was due to the sudden appearance of one of the twins between the donkey's glossy ears.

"I'm not Spirea, I'm Speedwell," replied the fairy, "but it's of no consequence. Is your godmother likely to want you within the next hour or so?"

"No," said Philomène, "she has driven off to pay a call, and won't be back till nearly supper-time."

"That is really very fortunate," said Speedwell, "because it would have been a pity for you to miss this chance. There is an old merman in a little creek about half a mile from here, and if you come with me quickly, I will introduce you to him."

For a moment Philomène's heart seemed to stand still with the very joy and marvel of the thing, but the next she had begun to run, and the elf half ran, half flew, by her side. The beach was of yellow sand, hard and smooth, stretching for mile upon mile along the coast;

"THERE SAT THE OLD MERMAN GAZING OUT TO SEA"

the tide was coming in, blue fringed with white by the shore, but a vague, sad purple farther out to sea. The little creek was soon reached, and as the sea ran up into it, smooth and shallow, Philomène took off her shoes and stockings, and began to paddle; and there, sure enough in the shelter of a projecting rock, screened from the steady August sunshine, and with his tail in the water, sat the old merman, gazing out to sea.

"This is Philomène," said Speedwell, and turning round, she half ran, half flew, back across the sands, as fast as glistening wings and little green shoes could carry her.

Philomène sat down on a low boulder, her feet dangling in the warm caressing water, her wide eyes fixed upon the merman. She had neither the breath nor the courage to start a conversation. The merman raised his head and tossed back his sea-green hair from his sea-green eyes; then passing his fingers through the matted locks, where tiny shells hung tangled, he turned upon Philomène a rugged, weather-beaten face.

"I am glad to see you," he said in a deep, musical voice, "the fairies seem to be your very good friends."

"I should be very much obliged if you would tell me about the sea," suggested Philomène timidly.

The merman laughed a deep, musical laugh. "That would indeed be a long story," said he, "it is as if some one were to say to you, 'Tell me about the land.' So you love the sea, do you?"

"Yes, I love it," replied Philomène, looking away over it towards the horizon, "it is beautiful in the same sort of way as the deep red of S. Mary Magdalene's dress in the chapel, burning red like cherries with the sun on them, and like the third chord in 'Lead, kindly Light,' and like the smell of the garden early in the morning, and they all make one hurt inside in just the same way, though they are such very different things."

Philomène was wondering if anything were making the merman "hurt inside," he was so silent and grave, but then she remembered that the mer-folk are said to have no souls, and must feel that everything beautiful is but for a very little while.

"I don't expect he would marry me even if I asked him to," she reflected, "and that is supposed to be the only way of helping a mer-

person to a soul. Oh, I do wish I could get one for him! But perhaps there is another way after all, though no one has found it out yet. I must not forget to think of him next time I go to church."

She was not quite sure what particular prayer could be made to fit him, but at last decided that he might very well count as one of the people in the Litany who "travel by water." She had just arrived at this conclusion, when the merman roused himself from his reverie, and turned towards her.

"I cannot tell you all about the sea in one conversation," he said, "but a little is better than nothing at all, so I will tell you a story. It is the way of the land-folk to speak of the sea as treacherous, but this story will show you that she keeps faith with her own."

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH THE MERMAN TELLS HIS STORY

"THERE was once upon a time a poor fisher couple who lived together in a hut upon a lonely beach, and while the husband was absent fishing upon the high seas, the wife earned a scanty livelihood by spinning.

Now one stormy winter's night a little daughter was born to them, and because the mother would have it that the child was ailing, the fisherman struggled forth into the howling gale to fetch a priest for the christening. The path was narrow between the cliffs and the sea, and the waves were so violent that he feared lest they might overwhelm him at any moment. All at once he caught sight of a merman mounted on one of the crested billows.

"Whither away, good neighbour, in the wind and dark?" quoth he.

"My wife lies at home with a newborn child," replied the fisherman, "and I go in search of a priest that he may christen it."

"I pray you, let me stand sponsor," said the merman.

"That shall never be," the fisherman made answer, "what part or lot have you in any christening?"

At that the merman grew very angry. "You fool!" he cried, "is the goodwill of the sea nothing to you? Has she no treasures in her depths for those whom she favours?"

Now the fisherman had no mind to set the sea against him, moreover he was in haste; he therefore gave his consent, and hurried on. That same night a priest came to the little hut on the beach, and christened the baby, and they called her name Carey, because, like one of Mother Carey's chickens, she had made her nest in the storm. And all the while the sea roared around the hut, and the fisherman, casting a furtive glance at the window behind him, saw that the merman was looking in. From that time forward things went well with him; his fishing prospered, and the tempest spared his boat. Nevertheless he resolved to say no word to his wife about the merman's sponsorship.

Now when Carey had grown to be a little maid of some seven years old, she was playing by herself late one summer's afternoon upon

the yellow sands that sloped to the water's edge. All of a sudden a voice called to her. "Carey!" it said, and again, "Carey!" Then, turning her head, she became aware of a merman, seated under a rock near by, and basking in the hot afternoon sunshine. He had a rugged, somewhat world-weary look, and the hair hung about his face like ribbons of brown seaweed, while his eyes were brown and gentle like the eyes of a seal.

"So we meet at last, goddaughter," said he.

"Are you my godfather then?" asked Carey, and she came fearlessly and sat down beside him on the rippling sand.

"That I am indeed," the merman made answer, "and here is a belated christening gift." And so saying he hung about her neck a necklace of sea-shells. "Do not despise it," he added, "though it looks but a poor thing. It may be that some day you will learn its worth, for so long as you wear it the sea will know you for her own." Then he told her how it happened that he had come to be her godfather, after which little Carey said she must go home, but she promised to return to that same creek on the following day, and to say nothing to her parents of the meeting.

So the next day she came again, and the day after, and every day throughout the summer she ran to the little creek to see her godfather, and hear from him strange songs and stories of the sea, to which she loved to listen, for all they were so sad. And in the winter, when the rough weather kept her indoors, she would sit contentedly by the fire while her father was mending his nets and her mother span, and would tell over the wondrous tales to herself till she had them by heart. Nor was it long before the summer came again, and then another winter.

Now one Christmas night Carey lay broad awake, and listened to the bells from the grey church on the wind-swept cliff, chiming far and wide across the sea, and on the following morning she slipped out unnoticed and ran to the sheltered creek. This time her godfather was nowhere to be seen, but nothing doubting she called to him, standing barefooted where the waves broke, and at her call he rose straightway out of the sea.

"Last night I heard the church bells, godfather," said Carey as she sat beside him under their favourite rock, "were they not beautiful?" But the old merman's face darkened as she spoke.

"They are not beautiful to me," he made answer, "I know that your race has a love for the sound, and soon grows homesick for the want of it, but with my people it is not so. I will tell you what befell me long ago. There stood a little chapel on a rocky islet, and one Christmas night the bells rang out so joyously and with such a note of welcome in their voices, that I pressed as close as I might to the window of many-coloured glass, and within there was light, and the sound of chanting. But when the monks came forth, they drove me away with hard words, and called me an evil spirit."

Then Carey put her arms about him, and kissed him many times, saying, "Never mind, dear godfather; I know that you are not an evil spirit, and I will always love you." And at that the smile came again to his face. These were happy years for them both, and they sped past unheeded, till Carey was no longer a little maid, but a fair tall maiden with many suitors.

Now it happened that one Shrovetide Carey went to church, and as she followed the straggling path along the top of the cliffs, a stranger joined her, clad like a huntsman all in green, with a horn by his side, and two great hounds at his heels.

"Where are you going, fair maid?" asked he.

"I go to church," she said, "because it is Shrovetide."

"May I walk by your side?" he asked.

"That you may, if it so please you," said she. So they walked on together, talking as they went, but when they reached the little grey church he stopped short.

"Do you go in alone, mistress," he said, "and I will wait for you here."

So Carey entered the church alone, but as soon as she came out the huntsman joined her again, and they walked homewards together. Now he was a fair-spoken man, with much to tell of distant climes and strange adventures, so that Carey contrasted him in her thoughts with the uncouth, tongue-tied fisher lads, her wooers, and was sorry when the moment came for parting.

"Here I must bid you farewell," said she, when the pathway was reached that led down to the shore, "for my home lies yonder."

"Will you not first appoint me a trysting-place?" quoth he.

At that Carey's heart took fright in her breast, nevertheless she made answer, as though

compelled thereto ; " To-morrow I go cockling down upon the sands."

" And may I seek you there ? " asked the huntsman.

" That I did not say," said she, and she turned and ran from him down the winding path, her thoughts all in a turmoil of fear and joy and wonder. But when she reached home she found sorrow awaiting her, for her father, whom she dearly loved, had fallen grievously sick. All night she nursed him, but on the morrow her mother took her place, and bade her go cockling.

So Carey took her basket and made her way along the yellow sands, with joy and grief at war in her heart, and as she went the waves cast up a large sea-shell at her feet. Stooping she picked it up, and put it to her ear, for the sake of the music that it held. " Turn back, turn back," murmured the voice of the sea, " have nothing to do with this stranger."

" This is surely a message from my god-father," said Carey to herself, and for a while she stood irresolute with the shell in her hand, but at last she threw it from her, back into the tumbling foam. " I will go to the trysting-place all the same," said she, " for I have

pledged my word." But it was not the thought of her promise that moved her, but her fancy for the stranger, which she mistook for love. Not many minutes later she saw him coming towards her, and at first they talked together as on the previous day, but soon he began to court her with words and caresses, and besought her to follow him to his home.

"That I cannot do," said Carey, "for my father lies dying."

"Appoint me at least to-morrow's trysting-place," said he, "and then I will let you go. Know you the inland woods, and the green ride in their midst, with a fallen tree-trunk at the end of it?"

"I know it well," replied Carey, "it is where the early primroses blow." So saying she turned away from him, and made haste homewards.

Now the next day, when the fisherman lay at the point of death, he said to his wife; "Wife, I have something on my mind; it is a secret I have kept from you these many years." And thereupon he told her of Carey's godfather, the merman, and of how he had been present at the christening. "I charge you," added the dying man, "not to deal harshly

with our daughter on this account, since it was none of her doing. Moreover, it has brought us good fortune." And having said these words, the sick man breathed his last.

But that very hour the fisherman's widow said to Carey; "This is no light matter that your father has confessed to me. Swear to me that you have had no intercourse with this sea-monster."

"That will I not," said Carey staunchly, "for I have known him since I was a little maid, and he is no sea-monster at all, but the kindest godfather in the world."

At that her mother flew into a frenzy of rage. "You deceitful hussy!" she screamed, "so behind my back you have had dealings with a wicked sprite that is without an immortal soul! Get you gone this instant!" And so saying she drove her from the house.

Then Carey went sadly along the beach till she reached the familiar creek, and there she sought her godfather in his wonted haunts, and when she could not find him she called to him many times, but he neither came nor answered. The sea was running high, and the weather was dark and lowering.

"He is angry with me because I did not heed

his message yesterday," thought Carey, "he too has forsaken me. I will go to the wood and meet the huntsman there, for he alone is left to love me."

Now it happened that on her way inland Carey came across a horse-shoe, which she picked up and took with her for good luck. As soon as she had reached the green ride in the midst of the wood, she saw the stranger at the farther end of it, standing by the fallen tree-trunk, with a great coal-black steed at his side, and the two hounds with him. She held up the horse-shoe in token of welcome, and when she had drawn nearer she called to him merrily, "Only see what I have found! It will bring us good fortune!"

But even as she spoke, the horse reared and pawed the ground, the hounds whined and cowered at their master's feet, and the huntsman himself held out both hands before his face, as though to avert a danger.

"Maid, if you bear me any love," cried he, "throw the thing from you! I come of a race that is at enmity with iron!"

So Carey, though she understood him not at all, tossed the horse-shoe into a thicket hard by, and approached her lover. But he on a

sudden sprang upon his horse, and caught her to him, and set her on the saddle before him. Then the great black steed rose up into the air, and the hounds with it, and Carey screamed aloud in her terror.

"You are no other than the Wild Huntsman!" she cried out, "woe worth the day that I met you!" Then it was that she remembered how all evil spirits stand in great fear of iron, and knew too late that had she but kept firm hold of the horse-shoe, he could have done her no harm.

Over the tree-tops they soared, and on through the air like a whirlwind, away and away over forest and field and morass, till they came to the mountain fastness where the Wild Huntsman had his home. Bleak and grim was his castle, and it stood amidst sombre, impenetrable forests. Here he held Carey a captive, but whenever he rode forth in the night he would take her with him, and set her before him on his mighty, coal-black steed. Then when the storm blast shrieked overhead, the forest folk would cower together in their huts, and say trembling one to the other; "The Wild Huntsman passes on his way. Hark to the baying of his hounds!"

But on midsummer's eve Carey saw from

the battlements that there were beacon fires burning on all the hill tops far and near, and she rejoiced to think that he could not venture forth that night, for the fires one and all were lit to keep evil spirits at a distance.

Wearily, wearily, the nights and days wore away, and Carey soon lost all count of time. The trees grew leafless and the winds more blustering, and the Wild Huntsman rode abroad more often. Only one day as Carey sat by her casement, she saw a long procession of gnomes, bent and brown and wrinkled, filing through a cleft in a rock, and disappearing one by one. By that she knew that it must be Martinmas already, when the dwarfs bid farewell to the bleak upper world, and retreat to their warm winter quarters in the heart of the earth.

Drearily, drearily, the days and nights wore on, and when Carey rode forth with the Wild Huntsman, she could see nothing below her but pathless wastes of snow, and forest trees groaning beneath a grievous burden of icicles. Then she called to mind the cheery winter evenings in her father's hut, and she would have wept save that all her tears seemed frozen, even as the world.

At the last came Yuletide. Carey sat alone in the great hall of the castle, and the Yule log sputtered on the hearth.

"Ah me, how bitter cold it is," chirruped a cricket, breaking silence, and Carey, rousing herself from her sad musings, remembered an old wife's tale that birds and beasts and even stocks and stones gain speech on Christmas Eve.

"If you are cold, friend cricket," quoth the Yule log in a crackling voice, "I pray you draw a little nearer to my blaze." And he burst asunder into such a lively flame, that it would have done any heart good to see it, and warmed even the sad heart of Carey.

"This is no proper house for the keeping of Yule," muttered the hearthstone morosely, "never so much as a sprig of yew or holly, let alone a goodly show of mistletoe, with tankards of brown ale and a boar's head all a-smoking."

"It is indeed a desolate hearth, my friends," said Carey sorrowfully, "and I have greater reason for complaint than you all."

"Take courage, mistress," said the Yule log cheerily, "things may take a turn for the better with you, just as they did with me.

Look you, I stood a long while in the forest, perished with cold, snow upon my head and snow at my feet, but now I am a merry Yule log, and warm to the inmost heart of me."

"Then I too will take courage," said Carey, though she sighed as she spoke.

Now between Christmas and Twelfth Night the Wild Huntsman rode abroad every night, and Carey rode with him. But on Twelfth Night itself, as she sat before him on horseback, she caught a glimpse of a far silver streak upon the horizon, and as the Wild Hunt swept onward through the frosty air, the streak broadened and broadened till it grew to a shining expanse, and Carey knew that at last she was within sight of the sea. Tremblingly she put up her hand to her neck, and felt for the necklace of shells that was still securely clasped about it.

"I will throw myself upon the mercy of the sea," said she to herself, "am I not its godchild? And if I die, death will be better than my present lot." Already the waters were rolling beneath her, ashen grey in the moonlight. Therefore, on a sudden, she sprang down from the Wild Huntsman's horse, and plunged into the wintry sea. Coldly, darkly, thunder-

ously, the waves closed overhead, and her senses forsook her.

When she came to herself she was lying stretched upon an immense plain, with strange trees waving above her and strange flowers round about; strange, many-eyed creatures slipped past her, gazing curiously, and over her hung the still waters, green as twilight skies. Carey got to her feet, all lost in wonder, and as she stood looking about her, a mighty shadow purpled the water, and towards her a monstrous serpent came swimming.

"Fear nothing, Carey," it said, "for we are all your friends."

"Then I pray you take me to my godfather," she begged, "I am afraid to linger in this strange country all alone."

"Mount upon my back then," quoth the sea-serpent, "and cling to my shaggy mane." So together they sped away over mountain and valley, through forests of branching coral, past cities and hamlets where the mer-folk dwelt, and sunken ships in the midst of forgotten treasures.

At last they reached a cave in a hillside, and here the sea-serpent set her down and left her. On the instant her godfather came to meet her;

tenderly he kissed away her self-reproaches, and bidding her rest and refresh herself, he led her to an inner room, where the roof and walls were all of amber, while the floor was strewn with pure white sand. Then he sent his servants to her, swift and silent fishes, who waited upon her with the choicest dainties of the sea, and prepared for her a bed of sea-mew's down, upon which she lay and slept for many hours.

As soon as she was awake again, the noiseless fishes returned, and deftly robed her in a fair green dress of feathery seaweed, more delicate than any lace; also they adorned her with chains of lustrous pearls, and wound red sea-anemones in her dark hair, and when she was ready she went in to her godfather, who greeted her with all affection.

"I have been lonely without you, Carey," said the old merman, "have you come to stay with me now, and to be my little maid as in the former days?"

"If you will have me, godfather," said Carey, "I will remain with you here, and be as a daughter to you."

So for nearly a year these two lived together in great contentment, but on New Year's Eve

Carey said to her godfather; "There is a longing within me to-night that will not be stayed; I must needs rise to the surface once again, and hear the midnight chimes from our little grey church on the cliffs."

At these words the merman grew very sad. "I knew it would come sooner or later," said he, "go, my child, since you must. You are free."

Thus it was that when midnight drew on, Carey rose out of the waves hard by the familiar coast, and sitting down under the rock where first she had seen her godfather, she held her breath and listened.

All in a moment the bells burst forth, ringing in the new year; merrily they chimed, yet with an undertone of sadness for the year that was past; over sea and land they clashed and pealed, rushing, swelling, dying, and as Carey heard them her heart-strings nigh snapped with homesickness. Nevertheless when the golden tongued bells had fallen silent once more, she went back into the breaking seas.

At home in his cave the old merman sat and mused. "It were better to die at once and dissolve into foam," said he to himself, "than to live on through the unnumbered years

without her." Yet even as he thought it, Carey entered, whom he had never hoped to see returning, and put her arms about his neck.

"So, Carey, you have come back to me after all," he said wonderingly, "back from your own kind and the free upper air, away from the memories and the bells?"

"There are none left upon the shore to love me now," she made answer, "my father is dead, and my mother has cast me out. I will remain here with you."

At that the old merman rejoiced greatly, for he knew that he would now be lonely no longer. As for Carey, his goddaughter, she left off from her homesickness, and lived among the mer-folk as one of themselves."

"And is she living there still?" asked Philomène.

But the merman had forgotten her, and was looking out to sea again. So she rose quietly, and paddled out of the creek; the tide was all but in now, and she ran home barefooted along the yellow sands.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH THE TWIN SISTERS TELL A STORY BETWEEN THEM

It was August still, and early evening; an evening of balmy airs and dappled skies. Philomène, bedded in bracken, lay nestling at the foot of a mighty pine-tree on the outskirts of the woods, separated only by a haha from the garden of the Cushats, and the twin fairies were with her. Speedwell was seated in a swinging hammock of green tendrils, in among the undergrowth, and was busy making herself some intricate spider's web lace, while Spirea, on a fallen pine-cone, stitched away industriously at a dainty patchwork coverlet of sweetpea petals for the bed in the dovecot.

"I do wonder," Philomène was saying, "whether my merman knew the merman who was Carey's godfather. Perhaps they were old friends, like Godmother and my mother, only of course at the bottom of the sea."

"That reminds me," said Speedwell, "that

neither of us has ever yet told you a story. We seem always to have had so many other things to talk about. Would you like one now?"

"Why, yes, I should, ever so much," replied Philomène, "and I think I should like it to be about water, and about trees and ferns and mosses, just like these here, if you don't mind."

"If it's a fresh-water story she wants," observed Spirea, "you might as well tell her the one about the pixie's nursling."

"So I might," said Speedwell, and she began:—

"In the heart of a certain forest there was a deep pool, still and green, where waterlilies rocked in the summer time. Now it happened that a woodcutter had daily to pass this pool as he went to and fro from his work, and one evening as he came by he heard a sweet voice calling to him from the water, saying; "Good master woodcutter, I pray you make me a cradle." Then, because he was under the spell of the sweet voice, the woodcutter went home and sat up all night, making an oaken cradle.

"What are you about?" asked his wife, "why will you not come to bed?"

"I met a stranger in the forest," replied her

husband, "and she begged me of my charity to make her a cradle for her newborn child."

When morning broke, the woodcutter went back to his work, and as he passed the pool he set down the cradle upon its mossy bank; and that same evening when he came by again, he heard the cradle rocking under water, and the sweet voice called to him a second time, and said; "Of what use to me is a cradle except I know a lullaby also? Good master woodcutter, I pray you teach me a lullaby." So the woodcutter went home and said to his wife; "Tell me now, wife, what are the words of the cradle-song which you sing to our little son?"

"They are but an idle jingle," returned his wife.

"Tell me them notwithstanding," persisted her husband, "for the tune runs in my head, but the words I have forgotten."

"These are the words then," said she.

"The hermit has tolled his bell,
And the wizard moon rides high;
Ah me, the bell and the moon!
Bye, bye, little sweeting, bye, bye;
Sing-song; ding-dong;
And so good-night to the moon."

"It is but a meaningless jingle, as you said," quoth the woodcutter.

But the next day when he went to his work in the forest, he stood still among the rushes by the pool, and sang the lullaby aloud; and that same evening as he came by he heard the cradle rocking under water, and the sweet voice singing the cradle-song; but as he drew nearer it broke off, and called to him the third time, and said; "Of what use to me are a cradle and a lullaby, except I have a baby also? Good master woodcutter, I pray you bring me a baby." Then, because he was bewitched, the woodcutter went home and said to his wife, "Wife, there is a fair to-morrow at the town. Would you like to go?"

"I should like nothing half so well," said she, "but I cannot leave the little one."

"Give the child to me," said her husband, "and I promise you that no harm shall befall him."

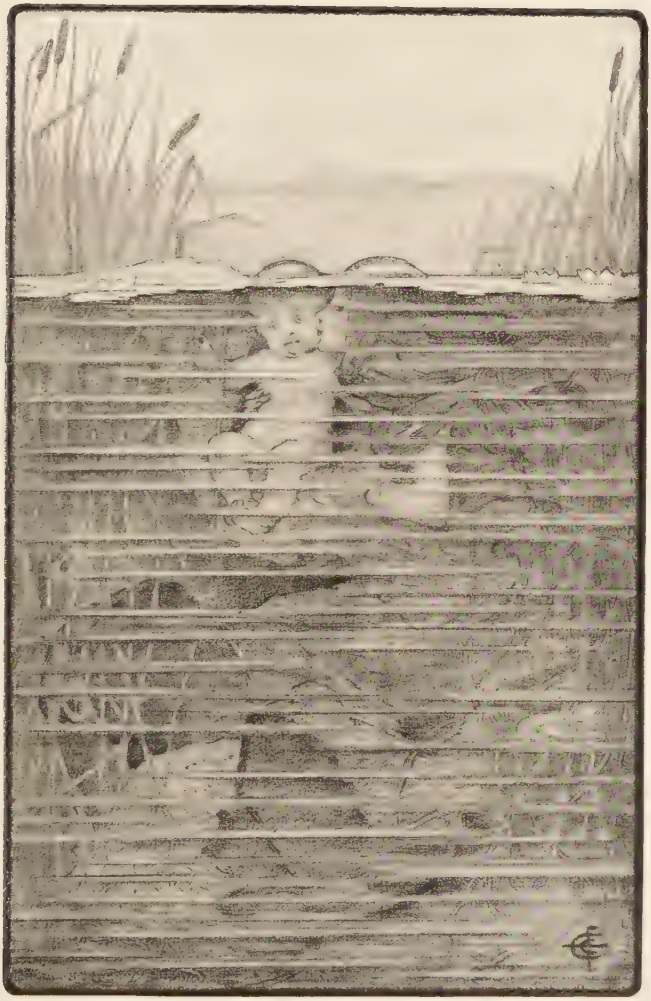
So when it was morning the woodcutter took his little son, and went and laid him down on a bed of sorrel by the pool, and hurried on into the forest; and that same evening as he came by again, he heard the cradle rocking under water, and the sweet voice singing the lullaby.

and the happy cooing of a baby. But when he reached home he told his wife that as he had been hewing timber in one of the forest glades, a kite had swooped down and carried off the child. Then the poor mother wept bitterly, and would not be consoled.

Now within the pool there dwelt a beautiful pixie, fair and white as any swan, with radiant golden hair, and eyes clearer than crystal. Yet for all she was so fair, and had her home in among the white and yellow waterlilies, the pixie hated her life and was weary of it, for she had lived already through unnumbered years.

"Did I not know the world when it was young?" sighed she to herself, "ah, would that I might grow old along with it."

Now it had been told her that a draught of the elixir of death could alone release her, and that both the elixirs of death and of life were in the keeping of a mighty wizard, who lived in a great castle surrounded by a golden wall. In this wall was a golden gate which would open only to one who had no love for gold, while the little glass postern door that led into the castle would open only to him who had no love for lies, and across the doorway of



"KISSED IT SO THAT IT MIGHT BE ABLE TO LIVE UNDER WATER"

the wizard's chamber hung a silken curtain which could be drawn aside only by one who had never loved a woman. Now the pixie knew very well that it would be all but impossible for any man brought up among his kind to stand these three tests, so she resolved to rear a human child in the safe, secluded pool, and send it forth upon her quest. Already she had had three nurslings, who had grown to manhood and gone forth into the world, but not one of them had returned to bring her the elixir.

"Three generations have failed me," said the pixie to herself, "but I will try yet once again." So she cast a spell upon the wood-cutter, and took his child and kissed it, so that it might be able to live under the water, and drew it down into the pool; and she gave it the name of Sorrel because of the bed of wood-sorrel upon which she had found it. Every night she sang to him his mother's lullaby, and little Sorrel would look up through the crystal clear water at the mirrored moon, and would bid it good-night. Then when he grew older, the pixie taught him to play most sweetly upon a bulrush pipe, and many a wondrous story did she tell him of the early days before men lived upon the earth.

At last when Sorrel had grown to be a tall, strong youth, the pixie said to him; "The time has come, my son, when you should go forth into the upper world for my sake, and ask the elixir of death from a great wizard who lives far from here, for I am weary of my long, long life."

At first Sorrel was much grieved at her words, for he loved the pixie dearly, as though she had been his own mother, but when he saw that it was indeed her heart's desire, he promised that he would not rest till he had found the elixir. Then he bade her a tender farewell and set out, and as he walked through the great forest that was a new, strange world to him, he played a sweet air upon his bulrush pipe to keep up his spirits.

Beyond the forest lay a populous city which Sorrel reached at sundown, and as he wandered through it he gazed curiously at the many streets and houses, and at the fountains that played in the great squares. Now it happened that the king and queen of the country lived in that city, and as they sat together at one of the windows of their palace, they caught the strains of Sorrel's pipe as he passed in the street below. So enchanted were they by its

music, that they at once gave orders that he should be brought before them.

"Who taught you to play so melodiously upon a bulrush pipe?" asked the king.

"Sire, it was my mother," replied Sorrel.

"Will you remain with us and be our court musician?" asked the queen.

"Madam, that I cannot," returned Sorrel, "for my mother has sent me upon a very urgent quest. But I will gladly play to you now, it if so please you." So Sorrel played to the king and queen, and after that they led him into the great banqueting-hall, where there was much feasting and merry-making.

Now it was in this very palace that all the pixie's former nurslings had loitered and remained. The first had soon grown covetous of money, and became so skilful in the management of it that he was made Lord High Treasurer. He was now a very old man, and his one delight was to handle the gold pieces in the royal exchequer, which he did every day. The second had quickly learnt the art of lying, and soon flattered so adroitly that he was appointed court chaplain, and in every one of his sermons he told the king and queen what an excellent influence they exerted upon the

court. "My dear," said each to the other, "we are indeed fortunate to have secured so eloquent a preacher and so wise a man." As for the third, he had fallen in love with the king's daughter, and had married her, and now lived in the greatest pomp as the king's son-in-law. Thus it came about that not one of the three nurslings had given another thought to the pixie, who had longed hourly for their homecoming.

But Sorrel took no delight in the splendours which he saw about him, for it seemed to him that the yellow gold was not half so pleasant to look at as the yellow waterlilies at home. The courtiers paid him well turned compliments upon his skill in music, but he noticed that for all their flattery they looked at him askance as soon as he began to speak about his mother and his life in the forest pool. As for the court ladies, so far from falling in love with any one of them, he thought them all quite ugly when he compared them with the beautiful pixie. The very next day he again set out upon his travels, and would not linger at the palace, because he had his mother's quest at heart.

"And now, sister," said Speedwell, breaking

off suddenly, "I have come to the most difficult part in all my pattern, where one mistake would spoil the lace, so you had better tell the rest."

"Willingly," said Spirea, and she continued:—

"Beyond the city lay another great forest in which Sorrel wandered all day long without finding a way out. At last night fell, and he was just wondering whether he would have to seek shelter under a tree, when he heard the sound of a bell tolling near by, and soon came upon a hermitage which stood upon the edge of the forest, with a bare and lonely heath stretching away in front of it. Sorrel knocked at the door of the hut, whereupon an old hermit at once opened to him, and greeted him kindly.

"Come in," said he, "all strangers are welcome here." And he made Sorrel sit down, and gave him some rye bread and salt fish for his supper, with a mug of sour wine to drink.

"Have you come from far?" asked the old man.

"My home is in the forest on the other side of the city," replied Sorrel.

"Are you a forester's son then?" asked the hermit.

"No, good father," replied Sorrel, and he began telling the old man all about his beautiful mother and his home, but no sooner had he uttered the first word about living under water, than the hermit started to his feet, and trembled all over with rage.

"You must be the son of a witch!" he screamed, "get out of my house!" And he took Sorrel by the shoulders and thrust him out into the night.

"These men are a strange race," thought Sorrel, greatly bewildered, "I was happier under the water." And feeling somewhat disconsolate, he went out upon the waste heath and stood looking about him. Just then the moon broke through a cloud.

"Good-night," said the moon.

"Good-night," said Sorrel.

"It is not everyone who bids me good-night as regularly as you did when you were a child," said the moon, "is there anything I can do for you?"

"You can light me across this heath if you will," replied Sorrel.

"With all my heart," the moon made answer.

So Sorrel set out across the wide expanse of heath, and all the while the moon went on

before him and showed him the way, till at last they came to a deep ravine, at the bottom of which stood the wizard's splendid castle, while on either hand there rose steep walls of rock, as sheer as the side of any house, so that Sorrel looked down into the chasm with dismay.

"Catch!" cried the moon, and flung him a ladder of moonbeams, by the help of which he descended the precipice in safety.

No sooner had he reached the golden gate of the castle than it opened of itself, and crossing the great courtyard, he saw that the little glass postern door stood open already. Then Sorrel mounted flight upon flight of marble steps, till he came upon an arched doorway. He drew aside the silken curtain that hung across it, and with a bold step entered the room where the mighty wizard sat, among his phials and talismans and all manner of magical appliances.

"What is your errand?" asked the wizard in a harsh voice.

"I seek the elixir of death," replied Sorrel fearlessly.

"Many desire the elixir of life," said the wizard, "the other is sought but seldom. Here they are, both together. Choose." So

saying he handed Sorrel two tall crystal vases, each filled with a clear colourless fluid.

Then Sorrel dipped his bulrush pipe into one of the vases, and it blossomed, but when he dipped it into the other it withered and died. So he took the elixir of death with him, and left the castle, and scaled the steep cliff by the help of the ladder. His friend the moon was still high in the heavens, and lighted him back across the trackless heath.

With all possible speed Sorrel hastened onwards, but when he reached the forest in which his home lay, he became very thirsty, and wandered to and fro among the thickets seeking for a brook or a spring. At last, faint and weary with his fruitless search, he lay down under a spreading tree, but the crystal vase he placed beyond his reach, lest in his great thirst he should be tempted to drink the deadly elixir. Soon there came by a fair young pixie, gathering mosses and ferns for her grotto, and Sorrel begged her for some water.

"Water is close at hand," said she, "for we pixies may not stray far from our springs," and she went and fetched some water in a shell and gave it to him.

"But tell me now," she said, "is there not water in yonder vase?"

"That is the elixir of death," replied Sorrel, and he told her of his quest, and as they sat together under the tree, they loved one another and plighted their troth.

"Only first I must go back to my mother," said Sorrel, "and after that I will return to you."

So she brought him to a mossgrown path which led him at last to the pool, and when the pixie saw him she rejoiced. "O Sorrel, you were rightly named," said she, "for does not wood-sorrel betoken mother's joy?"

Then she drank the elixir of death and straightway dissolved into a brook which gushed forth out of the pool, and flowed babbling through the forest. But Sorrel sat down by the brookside and lamented. Now it happened that the woodcutter's wife was passing that way, and she stopped to ask him the cause of his sorrow.

"I am mourning for my mother," he replied.

"As for me, I have mourned a son these twenty years," said the woodcutter's wife.

But Sorrel was not attending to what she said, for his thoughts were full of his own grief. Yet because he was young, he soon called to

mind the starry eyes of his newly betrothed, and when he had gone back to her he found her waiting for him by the same spreading tree. Then they made their way to a bubbling spring close at hand, and together they went down into her grotto."

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH THE HEROINE HEARS SOME STARTLING NEWS

It was towards the end of September that Philomène returned home. Her godmother was coming up to town also, and they travelled together, so that on that journey there was ginger-beer to drink, and not cold tea. She had not been at home more than an hour or so before she found an opportunity of taking her latch-key and running out into the garden, though the day was wet and windy. Sweet William was at home, and received her cordially.

"I came as soon as ever I could," she cried, holding out both hands to him, "I only waited till Nurse began unpacking for me next door, because I was afraid she would say I ought not to be out in the rain. And now I must tell you all about the Cushats, and Speedwell and Spirea, and the merman, and they both said it was the chance of a life-time, having him all to myself as I did." So Philomène told him

all her adventures, and Sweet William listened very attentively.

"Is the Cushats haunted?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, no," replied Philomène indignantly, "certainly not. Lilian Augusta's sister-in-law once saw a ghost," she continued, "and Lilian Augusta said she was as proud as a cat with two tails ever after; but I shouldn't be proud, only desperately frightened, if I thought a ghost was anywhere near me."

"That is a pity," said Sweet William blandly, "considering that there is a little spirit waiting to make friends with you in your very own room."

Philomène started up from her toadstool, and went quite white. "In my room?" she exclaimed, and her breath caught, "in my bedroom here at home?"

"Sit down, child," said Sweet William, "and don't be theatrical, for pity's sake. There's nothing at all to make a commotion about; it's only a White Létiche."

"And what is that, please?" asked Philomène, sitting down again and trying to steady her voice, though she was still rather pale.

"A White Létiche," said Sweet William,

"is the spirit of a child who was never christened, and visits, unseen, the rooms of children."

"Is my Létiche a baby, then?" asked Philomène.

"Oh, no," said Sweet William, "she was about twelve when she died, and a very sweet little girl she was too. She won't even appear to you unless you want her to, and then only on the 31st of October."

"Only on All Souls' Eve if I want her to," thought Philomène, "oh, well then, it isn't nearly as bad as it sounded at first."

"I was meaning to tell you something more about the people in your house," Sweet William continued, "the same house which, if I may remind you, you at one time considered so extremely uninteresting, but you seemed so much upset when I told you it had a White Létiche, that perhaps you will leave me altogether when I tell you that there is a white witch living in it too."

"I certainly shouldn't be rude and ungrateful enough to leave you," returned Philomène stoutly, "and I will try not to get frightened again, but I am afraid I don't know what a white witch is either. Godmother

told me lots about fairies, but I think she did not want me to know a great deal about witches, perhaps because she thought it might make me nervous when I went to bed."

"And judging from the exhibition you made of yourself just now," retorted Sweet William, "your godmother seems to have proved herself a woman of sense. Well, you must know that there are black witches and white witches, and that black witches often turn into black cats, and white witches into——"

"Queen Mab!" interrupted Philomène excitedly.

"Into white cats," resumed Sweet William, "such as Queen Mab. Here again there is nothing to be alarmed about, for white witches are a kindly race, and help people by white magic instead of injuring them by black art. I thought that as winter was coming on, I had better tell you that you will have another comrade in the house besides Master Mustard-seed, for in the cold weather you are not likely to see much of me. But you still look so disturbed, that I think I must distract your thoughts a little by telling you a story, not about spirits or witches, but about a poor little foundling whom the Good People befriended.

I hope this may quiet you down a bit before you have to go in-doors."

"I should like to hear about the foundling very much, thank you," said Philomène, and set herself to listen.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH SWEET WILLIAM TELLS ANOTHER STORY

"Once upon a time there lived a miller, who because he was a kind-hearted man and as well off as anyone needs to be, had taken pity upon a poor little foundling and had given him a home in the mill. On a bitter winter's night the child had been laid at his door, and the miller therefore christened him Jack Frost.

Some years later the miller took a wife, a young woman of a shrewish disposition and over-fond of money. She was not kind to little Jack Frost, and made him feel that he was a burden both to her husband and herself. Times were hard, she said, and he was too slow-witted to be of any real use about the mill. In the course of time a son was born to the miller's wife, and then things went from bad to worse with the foundling.

Nevertheless Jack Frost felt that he had good friends near at hand, and these were none

other than the Little People. In a field beyond the mill-race there was a fairy ring, in the centre of which grew a thorn-tree, and under this thorn-tree Jack Frost would sit by the hour, thinking and dreaming and talking to himself. More than once it had seemed to him that the fairy ring had brought him good fortune.

The first occasion was on an evening not long after the birth of the miller's son, when Jack Frost had been set to mind the baby, while the miller's wife cooked the supper. But being somewhat feather-headed, he forgot to rock the cradle, so that the baby woke up and began to cry. At that its mother grew so angry that she boxed the ears of Jack Frost and thrust him out of doors. But the miller felt sorry for him, and when his wife was not looking he went up to the table where a savoury dish had been set for his supper and hers, with a stale crust and a bowl of skimmed milk for the foundling. These he took, and stealing out of the mill by a back door gave them to the child, so that at least he might not have to go supperless to bed. Jack Frost thanked him, and went off to the field with the fairy ring in it, but no sooner had he sat down under the thorn-tree to eat his supper, than he discovered that he no longer held a crust and a bowl of skimmed

milk, but a little new loaf and a bowl of cream.

Again, a few years later, when it was winter-time, the miller's wife sent Jack Frost into the neighbouring town to do some errands for her. It was very cold, and the skies were overcast.

"It is going to snow," said the miller, as he stood by the window, "you should not have sent the boy out so late, my dear."

"A little snow never hurt anybody yet," replied his wife, and she drew her shawl closer round her shoulders and poked the fire.

Meanwhile Jack Frost was making his way home from the town, but before the mill came in sight it began to snow, and soon it was snowing so fast that he could not see a yard ahead of him. Thicker and thicker fell the flakes, blotting out hedge and stile and milestone. Jack Frost stumbled on a little farther, but he was cold and tired, and soon his legs began to give way under him. Then a great drowsiness overcame him, and he lay down to rest. As he fell asleep, it seemed to him that he was pillowed on a bed of down, and that a rich green canopy was spread above him, yet when he awoke in the morning, warm and well and light at heart, he saw that he had

slept all night upon the snow, and that there was no canopy overhead save the little stunted thorn-tree.

Now when Jack Frost had grown to be a youth, a great calamity befell the country. Not long before, the queen had given birth to a son, and throughout the land there were great festivities to do honour to the heir. But on Roodmas Eve, when the fairies are abroad, they stole away the little prince, and put a changeling in his stead, so ugly and malicious that he soon became the plague and terror of the whole court. The king at once summoned all his wisest counsellors, and inquired of them what should be done in such a case, and they all with one accord assured him that there were but two remedies; either the fairy changeling must be made to laugh, or to refer in some way to his real age. Unfortunately, however, the new prince was far too cross-tempered to laugh under any circumstances, though the court jester and all the wits of the land did their utmost to amuse him; and though every device was tried to make him say that he had many and many a time seen the acorn turn to an oak and the oak to a cradle, the impish creature could not be induced to say

anything of the sort. Then the king issued a proclamation, promising untold riches as a reward to anyone who should restore his son, but it was all to no purpose.

At last it came into the mind of the foundling at the mill to test the good-will which the Little People had to him. "I will set out in search of the king's son," said he, "who can tell but that I may persuade the fairies to give him up, for surely the People of Peace have shown themselves my friends?"

"A likely thing indeed," sneered the miller's wife, "that you should succeed where the wisest of the land have failed! I suppose it is the king's proclamation which has put this nonsense into your head, but what would you do with all those riches, even if you had them, I should like to know? A great stupid loutish fellow like you!"

Jack Frost was not to be discouraged, however. He took a knapsack with him for his travels, and bidding good-bye to all at the mill, he set out. But first he thought he would like to go once more to the field beyond the mill-race, and take a last look at his thorn-tree; and no sooner had he stepped into the fairy ring, than he saw the fairies dancing in a circle round him.

"Whither away, Jack Frost?" asked they.

"I go in search of the king's son," replied the foundling.

"It is the fairy queen herself who has stolen him away," said the elves, "for he was very fair of face."

"Then I fear she will be loath to give him up," sighed Jack Frost.

At that one of the elves stepped forward, and said; "Listen to me, Jack Frost. You have just one chance of success. Not so very long ago our queen was choosing a christening gift for a poor charcoal-burner's child to whom she had promised to stand sponsor; all her choicest treasures were spread out before her, when suddenly a magpie swooped down and carried off a certain magic ring to its nest in a belfry. Now this ring was one of the queen's most priceless gifts, for it conferred on him who should possess it the good-will of wind and weather, the friendship of all the dumb creatures, and the power of making himself beloved wherever he might love. The queen is much grieved at its loss, and since no fairy may enter a belfry, none but a mortal can recover it. Now if you should find this ring, it may be that in her gratitude the queen will

consent to grant your request, to take back the changeling and to restore the king's son."

"How shall I find the belfry?" asked Jack Frost.

"Go by forest and road and sea, and you shall find it," replied the elf, "but first, Jack Frost, tell me what it is that you see in our thorn-tree?"

"I see a nest," replied Jack Frost, "and in it are seven speckled eggs."

"Take three of them," said the elf, "and you will find them useful. A bird does not build in the fairies' tree for nothing."

So Jack Frost took the three speckled eggs, thanked the Little People, and went his way. He soon came to a dense forest in which he wandered till nightfall without seeing any trace of a human dwelling. He was therefore very glad when at last he caught sight of a ruddy glint among the trees, and came upon a smithy in a clearing of the wood. Now this smithy belonged to a very wicked hobgoblin, who forged upon his anvil all the weapons that are wielded in unrighteous wars. Whoever fights in a wrongful quarrel or in defence of a bad cause, may be quite sure that his steel was forged at the hobgoblin's smithy. But Jack

Frost did not know this, and felt very thankful at having come across any kind of shelter, so approaching the smith he asked him for a night's lodging.

"You shall have supper and a bed," replied the hobgoblin, and leading Jack Frost into his house he gave him some broken victuals, and motioned him to a bed of straw. The foundling fell to with a good appetite, and then lay down upon the straw and fell fast asleep. In the morning he thanked his host for his hospitality, and prepared to continue his journey.

"Wait a bit," said the hobgoblin, "you have not yet paid me for your supper, nor for your bed overnight."

"Alas," replied Jack Frost, "I cannot pay you save in thanks, good sir, for I have no money."

"I have no need of money," replied the wicked sprite, "but you must pay me in service. All who break my bread are bound to serve me for seven years. Make haste therefore to sweep my room and cook my breakfast."

And so saying, he went out to his forge. As soon as Jack Frost was left alone, he took out the three speckled eggs, and broke them one

after another, hoping to find inside either something which he might offer to the hobgoblin in payment of his debt, or at least some means of escape. But in this he was disappointed. The first egg contained a pod with three seeds in it, the second a gossamer lasso, and the third a tiny packet of eye-salve.

"These things are of but little use to me at present," reflected the foundling sadly, and he submitted to his lot with as good a grace as might be. Seven years long he served the hobgoblin, who made him a hard master, but when the time had expired allowed him to go on his way unmolested.

Onwards through the forest went Jack Frost, sad at heart at the loss of time and the thwarting of his quest, and after some days' wanderings he came upon a path which at last led him out of the wood and into open country. Soon, however, he reached a place where four roads met, and stood still in some perplexity. Then he bethought him of the pod with the three seeds, and cast one seed upon each of the three roads before him. Straightway three young trees shot up, all bearing leaves, while the tree on the right bore blossoms and fruits as well. He therefore took the right

hand road, and walked along it for some considerable distance, till at length it sloped down to the sea shore and came to an end. Now upon the strand Jack Frost caught sight of a beautiful white horse, with streaming mane, and riderless, pacing to and fro.

"What is your name, fair steed?" asked he, "and who is your master?"

"My name is the wind," the beautiful white horse made answer, "and I have no master."

Then Jack Frost bethought him of the gossamer lasso, and threw it deftly, and caught the fleet-footed wind.

"Carry me across the water," said he, "for there is neither boat nor bridge."

"Then mount upon my back," returned the wind, "and lean your head against my long mane, and shut your eyes, for should you look downwards you would surely turn giddy."

So Jack Frost did as the wind bade him, and together they sped away across the waste of rolling billows that rocked and foamed far below them. Upon the opposite shore the wind set him down safely, and Jack Frost put his arms about the neck of the beautiful, swift steed, and kissed it between the eyes, but even

as he did so the wild creature started away from him, and fled back across the sea.

Then Jack Frost turned and went on his way, glad at heart, for already he had caught a glimpse of an old ivy-clad belfry among thick-standing trees. Into the low-browed porch he went, and up the winding stair, till he found the magpie's nest, and in among the sticks and straw he saw the gleam of the magic ring.

"And now it but remains to find the fairy queen," said Jack Frost to himself, as he stood again in the open, "yet I know not where she holds her court."

Then he bethought him of the tiny packet inside the third egg, and rubbing some of the eye-salve upon his eyes, he at once became aware of the fairy queen and her retinue, assembled in a grove close at hand. Then Jack Frost went and knelt to the queen, and offering her the magic ring, begged for the king's son in exchange.

"So, young sir, you would rob me of my bonny page?" said she, with one fair hand held out for the ring, and the other resting upon the curls of a beautiful seven-year-old boy at her side. But she smiled very graciously as

she spoke, for she was rejoiced at the recovery of the ring.

So the changeling returned whence he came, and the little prince was restored to his parents. As for Jack Frost, the foundling, he sat him down among the fairies in the grove, and having eaten and drunk in their midst, was seen of his own kind no more."

CHAPTER XVIII

OF WHICH THE SCENE IS LAID IN A SICK-ROOM

No sooner had Philomène returned to the house than Nurse began scolding her for having gone out into the wet. "As if you couldn't have waited till to-morrow to have a look at your garden," she said impatiently, "and the air as raw this afternoon as it might be November."

The next day Philomène was in bed with a bad chill, and was very far from well for several weeks, but she made a good little patient, swallowed her medicines without a grimace, and bravely hid her disappointment when Nurse refused to let her have Master Mustard-seed in the room with her, on the ground that his loud singing would give her a headache.

"If I could only explain to her," she thought sadly, "that he doesn't speak nearly as loud as he sings."

Philomène therefore had to do the best she

could by herself. She crowned herself queen of her bed-kingdom to begin with; the sheets and blankets were her subjects, her Prime Minister was the quilt, and the pillows made up her body-guard under the leadership of their captain the bolster. The eider-down she raised to the rank of Prince Consort, because he was arrayed in royal satin, and being wadded and yielding, was not likely to stand in the way of any of his wife's plans.

She also had the big globe out of the schoolroom placed on the chair by her bed, and proceeded to invent a geographical game worthy of a student of "The World and All About It." "Lady World is the mother," she said to herself, "and the continents are the governesses. I like Miss Europe best, and trust her most, because I know the most about her. The countries are head-nurses, and Mrs England is the headest of them all. Provinces and counties are under-nurses, and the towns are the children. Then I think mountains had better be coachmen and grooms and gardeners, and people of that sort, and the rivers can be maids, because they keep things clean, and gradually grow more important. The Isis only starts as a scullery-maid, but by the time it has got

to London it is an upper house-maid, and is called the Thames. I think the Atlantic is to be the big playground for the children, and the Indian Ocean is Lady World's drawing-room, because it has coral reefs and flying fish and phosphorus and exciting things in it, like the curios in Godmother's cabinets. The little seas like the Caspian and the White Sea are rather dull, so they can be used as store-rooms, and the five great lakes in North America are turned into sick-rooms when any of the towns get ill. Let me see, the Pacific had better be the kitchen, because there are so many islands in it which will do as cooks. The Arctic ocean is the bath-room, so that the children may get used to cold baths, and the Antarctic can be the lumber-room, because nobody goes there much."

It was on a dark and foggy afternoon that Philomène lay in bed, watching a goblin castle in among the coals, with twinkling battlements that would presently fall ruining, till drowsiness overcame her, and she closed her eyes. She had been wandering in the vasty entrance-hall of the play-house of sleep, though the spectacle of dreams had not as yet begun—(as she herself would have expressed it, the Dusty-Man in the theatre-

office was just going to give her the tickets, so that she might go in and see the show), when a strange yet strangely familiar voice purred into her ear; "Wake up, Philomène, wake up, beloved of the Little People."

Philomène started up, and looked straight into the green, affectionate eyes of Queen Mab. "Oh, Queen Mab, you dear thing," she stammered, "Sweet William told me about you, and I am only a very, very tiny bit afraid of you."

"There is no reason even for that tiny bit," replied the white cat, putting one of her paws into Philomène's hand, "have I ever thought of scratching or biting you, even when you put me to bed in a doll's cradle, and tried to make my ears fit into a doll's nightcap? Do you suppose I have forgotten how on that Christmas Eve when I first came to you, you as a little, little girl clung to Nurse, and told her how very little trouble I should be, because I would eat up the scraps and take in my own washing? No, Philomène, white witches are not ungrateful; I would not harm a hair of your dear little head."

Philomène lay back among the pillows. "Will you teach me how to work spells?"

she asked, "so that I can spirit away the little yellow book all about quarts and bushels and perches which Miss Mills loves, and the green dress that I can't bear because it hooks all up the back, and has such a vulgar broad stripe in it?"

"I wouldn't advise you to meddle with spells, my dear," returned Queen Mab, curling her tail right round her till it met her chin, "they are rather tricky things, and apt to go off at the wrong time, like chemicals. But if you like I will tell you a story which I think will make clear to you, better than anything else, the difference between black and white witches. Is the very, very tiny bit still there?"

"No," said Philomène, "you are my own dear Pussy, and I am sure you love me, and I am very glad that I can have you to talk to me in the winter-time when I sit nursing you by the fire. And now please begin the story."

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH QUEEN MAB TELLS HER STORY

"On a bleak and rocky coast there once stood a little fishing town, and on the high cliffs above it, looking seaward towards the sunrise, rose the stately pile of an old Abbey church, which was the pride of the place, for the folk in the little red-roofed town were poor and struggling, and had not much in their midst that was beautiful.

Legend said that long ago a certain wicked king had set his heart upon the Abbey treasures, and that at his command a ship had left the harbour laden with the choicest of them, but a great storm had arisen, so that the ship foundered, and the treasure went all to the bottom. Some said it might still be recovered if men would but dive for it outside the harbour bar, others declared that at night you could hear the buried Abbey bells chiming out at sea, others again did not believe in the story at all, and had never heard any bell ringing below water save the bell of the buoy.

Now just beyond the harbour bar there was a great rock, and this was said by some to be the haunt of a very evil black witch, but the people who said this were the same people that had heard the Abbey bells by night, and so got laughed at for their pains.

On the outskirts of the fishing town lived a poor man with one daughter, named Yolande, who was so beautiful and gracious that the richest farmer in all that countryside had asked her hand in marriage, but being very avaricious, he would not take her, fair as she was, without a dowry. Yolande herself had no wish to marry the old man, for all his fat cattle and his comfortable farmstead, for she loved his goat-herd, a youth as poor as herself.

Now it so happened that on midsummer eve Yolande's father went fishing, and as he passed the witch's rock, that towered above him like a great black house, he thought he heard the sound of muttering, but he rowed on quickly, and paid no heed. He caught no fish that day, and cursed his bad fortune as he hauled in his empty nets.

"If only Yolande might marry a rich man," he said to himself, "I should have no more need to work for my living," and he made his

way home with a heavy heart. The night was hot and still, and the lights of the town winked at him from the shore like gleaming, sleepless eyes. He had to pass below the rock outside the harbour, and as his boat entered its shadow, he again heard mutterings up above him, only this time he caught the words: "Amen. Malo a nos libera sed, tentationem in inducas nos ne." At this the fisherman grew very much afraid, for he knew that this could be no other than the black witch, who was saying the Pater Noster backwards, as all black witches do.

"Stop a while, friend," cried a hoarse voice from the rock, "I know your trouble, I know all about your daughter and the rich farmer who has asked her in marriage. What should you say to the old Abbey treasure as a dower for your girl?"

The black witch sprang from the rock, dived, and came up again, and before the fisherman could so much as cross himself or utter a cry, she was sitting opposite to him in the boat, her hands and the lap of her dress full of the Church's treasure.

"Ha! ha!" she laughed, "you are wondering, friend, how it is that I can handle these

holy things? Have you forgotten that it is midsummer eve, when evil spirits are abroad, and the devil has it all his own way? See, would not these be a fitting dower for a princess?" And she held up to him golden cross and golden crozier, rosaries of amber and pearl and coral, censers studded thick with gems; one precious thing after another she flashed before his eyes, fondling them with her wicked webbed hands, as though the shining vessels had never held the oil and wine of the altar.

"What answer do you give me?" cried the witch, tossing them back into the sea, "shall your daughter wed or no? Speak man, and do not stare at me with eyes like a dead fish! I tell you the treasure shall work her no harm; I have not strung unanswered prayers on the rosaries, I cannot curse what was once blessed, I have but made you an offer fair and square, and the bargain is between you and me."

"Give me time, give me time," cried the fisherman, sorely tempted, yet afraid to yield; "give me time, and let me pass."

The witch leapt laughing from the boat, and sat looking at him from the summit of her crag.

"You shall have nine months," she called out to him.

"Ten, give me ten," pleaded the fisherman, for he knew that he had no right to the treasure, and that his soul was at stake in this bargain.

"Ten, then," replied the witch with a loud laugh, "but I promise you they shall slip through your grasp as quickly as the ten pearls that lie side by side on a rosary."

On the morning of the day when the fisherman had to make his decision, it happened that Yolande rose very early and went into the woods to gather cowslips. Her father had lain awake all night, turning the whole matter over and over in his mind as he had done for months past. The winter gales had injured his boat, he was poorer than ever, and the farmer was growing impatient. Yolande was the fairest girl in the countryside, said he, but even she was not worth waiting for more than a year.

Yolande herself had slept serenely, and as she went with her basket deeper and deeper into the woods, she was glad with the gladness of the April morning, for her thoughts were with the poor goatherd, and she sang of love. In the heart of the forest lay a wide clearing called the golden meadow, for every spring

it was golden with cowslips, which grew here in greater sweetness and profusion than in any other field. Yolande picked and picked till her basket was full, and then sat down to refresh herself with the bread and cheese and the flask of milk she had brought with her.

She had no sooner begun eating than a little field mouse popped up out of its hole, and watched her with bright fearless eyes. "You dear little tame thing," said she, "you shall have some of my bread, because you are so venturesome for your size." The mouse took a few crumbs of the bread which she scattered for it, and disappeared down its hole.

Not long after, a robin hopped up to where she was sitting, and preened its red breast with its beak. "You shall have your share too," said Yolande, "because you were moved with pity on Good Friday, and tried to pluck away the nails, so that your little breast is now all stained with red." And since she had no more bread left, she threw a morsel of cheese towards it. The robin pecked at the cheese, and then flew away, carrying the rest in its beak.

Then Yolande poured out some milk into a pewter mug, and was about to drink, when

she noticed a white adder coiled at her feet. She gave a stiffled cry and drew back, but the creature did not stir.

"Poor thing," said Yolande, "I wonder is it thirsty? I will give it some of my milk, because it is so ugly, and people hate it, and never have a good word for it." The white adder drank the milk, and then coiled itself round Yolande's arm. At first she was afraid to move, but knowing that she must not be late for the market where she hoped to sell her cowslips, she at last got up and went back into the wood. She had not gone far before she passed a spreading sycamore, beneath which stood a small shrine. Here she placed some of her cowslips, and sprinkled herself with water out of the holy water stoup. A few drops lighted upon the adder, and in an instant it uncoiled itself, slipped to the ground, and turned into a white witch.

"Do not be frightened, Yolande," said she in a gentle voice, "I am a white witch, and practise only white magic, which is helpful and not hurtful to men. Listen to me; the black witch who dwells on the great rock beyond the harbour tempted your father last midsummer eve to accept at her hands the

buried Abbey treasure, so that you might have a rich dowry, and marry the farmer who has asked you to be his wife. To-day your father has to make his decision. But I will give you a better dowry, since you have given me food and drink, and are a good girl, Yolande, worthy of my help. Come back with me a few steps into the wood. Tell me, why do you suppose that this clearing is called the golden meadow ? "

" Is it not because of the yellow carpeting of cowslips ? " asked the girl.

" No," replied the witch, " there is another and an older reason." She made a movement in the air with her hand, and immediately the ground of the meadow became transparent, so that Yolande looked through it as through glass, and saw below it a mighty treasure rich in all manner of jewels and trinkets, gold and silver, jade, ivory and crystal.

" This is the dwarf's treasure," continued the white witch, again making the magic sign so that cowslips covered the ground as before, " but generations ago, when man first came to live upon this coast, and built the Abbey and the town, the dwarfs fled further inland towards the mountains, to escape from human dwellings. And since they had more treasure

than they could carry with them, they buried this great hoard here. I will give it to you as your dowry, so that your father may do no hurt to his soul."

Yolande fell at the witch's feet to thank her, but when she had spoken her thanks, she confessed with a blush that it was not the rich farmer whom she loved, but his poor goatherd.

"I know that," said the white witch smiling, "but this treasure of the dwarfs is more than the old farmer's riches multiplied a thousandfold, so that your father will not stand in the way of your marriage with the man you love. But you must make haste. Go to your father, and tell him all that I have told you. Then when the black witch comes to market to hear his answer, he will be able to say that he will have nothing to do with her and her treasure."

"How shall I know her?" asked Yolande.

"She will come to market," said the witch, "riding on a donkey that has no cross upon its back. Moreover, when she reaches the brook that flows hard by the market-place, she will turn and go round by another way, since it is not lawful for an evil spirit to cross running water. Take these two straws, and when you and your father return home together, lay them

on the ground behind you, across and across—so—and then she will not be able to bewitch you. If you should need my help again, call your name to the sevenfold echo on the beach, and I shall hear it and come to you."

All fell out as the white witch had said, and great was the joy of the fisherman on hearing that a rich dowry was to fall to his daughter without his having to call the black witch to his help. He was glad of the two straws, however, for when she rode up to him and heard his answer, she was so angry that he quailed before her; but Yolande had seen and spoken with her lover, and both were so happy at the thought of their approaching marriage that they felt no fear.

But the black witch lost no time in setting about her revenge. She came to the goatherd in the guise of a peddling gipsy, and offered him for sale the picture of a beautiful maiden. Now over this picture the black witch had pronounced a charm, so that the goatherd could see nothing in it aright, but fancying it as fair as it seemed, fell so deeply in love with the beautiful face that he straightway ceased to love Yolande. The days went by; the goatherd did not keep his trysts with his betrothed,

and when he met her he was cold and careless. Yolande wondered and wept, but could not solve the mystery.

At last she bethought her of the kindly white witch, so one day she went alone to the beach. and raising her voice, she called out "Yolande! Yolande!" in the hope that the white witch would befriend her a second time. The echo from the rocks caught up her cry and passed it on, one echo echoing another, till it reached the ears of the white witch, who came flying towards the coast in the form of a gull. High above the old Abbey she soared, on strong white wings, and flew to Yolande's side.

"Tell me your trouble, child," said she, assuming her own shape. So Yolande told her all that had happened.

"It is black art," said the white witch, "your enemy has bewitched your lover. She has shown him the picture of a maiden whom he now loves instead of you. Look, Yolande, here is a mirror; what do you see in it?"

"I see the reflection of a maiden's face," replied Yolande, "and she is very fair, fairer than I."

The white witch then turned the other side of the mirror towards her. "Look again, Yolande," said she, "what is it now that you see?"

"A hideous, terrible wolf's face!" cried Yolande, shrinking back, "old and grey, with grinning teeth, and a mouth red and gaping, and hungry eyes."

"It is the face of a were-wolf," replied the white witch, "and we must force the black witch to remove her spell from your lover." She stood and considered for a moment. "Wait for me here," she said at last, and took flight in the shape of a gull. As twilight fell she returned. "I have found out," said she, "that the black witch is brewing a charm for which she requires many herbs, and none so much as myrrh. She will therefore go to church this evening, in the hope of snatching a little myrrh out of the censer as it swings. If only pure prayers mount with the incense, she will be foiled in her attempt; but if a single vengeful or presumptuous prayer is offered, the myrrh will be within her power to take. You must slip into the Abbey after vespers have begun, and kneel by the north door, taking with you some dragonwort. Now evil spirits

can only leave, just as they can only enter a church, on the north side, which is the devil's side, and as soon as the church is empty the black witch will hurry to the north door and try to get out. But you must stand within a circle of dragonwort, which will protect you from her, and not allow her to pass till she has promised to remove her wicked spells from your lover, and to molest you and yours no longer. She will be the more ready to promise anything you may ask, as to-night is Walpurgis Night, and she will be in haste to join her sister witches on the summit of the Brocken."

The lights were low in the Abbey church when Yolande came to kneel by the north door. The censer swung to and fro, and the prayers of the faithful rose heavenward with the incense. There were many holy prayers, but one evil prayer rose with the rest. Straightway a magpie swooped down from the rood-screen, and, snatching a grain of myrrh as the acolyte swung the censer to right and to left, flew back to its perch. When the service was over and the church empty, the magpie fluttered to the north door, and with a hoarse cry turned into the black witch, who stamped and raved, coaxed and cursed, but Yolande stood firm

within her sheltering circle of dragonwort, till the witch at last, afraid lest she should miss the tryst on the Brocken, angrily promised to molest the young couple no more. Then Yolande stood aside, and the black witch hurried out of the church.

So Yolande and the goatherd were married, and at their wedding a snow-white gull hovered about the porch of the Abbey, waiting till the bridal procession should pass out, and when it came, the bird flew on before it to Yolande's new home, and perched upon the roof in token of welcome. And that same night she fancied she heard the ringing of joy-bells, far out at sea."

"Do you know, Queen Mab," said Philomène, "though I was a little bit afraid when I first heard about you, having thought of you all these years as just a pussy, I was really more frightened when I heard about the White Létiche. Sweet William told me that she would appear on All Souls' Eve, if I liked, but after that I don't quite know what to do. Will she speak to me?"

"No, certainly not," replied Queen Mab, "a spirit never speaks first. You must begin."

"I suppose Sweet William will be keeping

"THE FAIRIES HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO ASSEMBLE"

Samhain that evening," said Philomène, and her eyes grew wide with longing. "Oh, I do so wish I could go with him, and yet I don't want to miss the White Létiche."

"Well, be a good child then," said Queen Mab, "and go to sleep, and I will see what I can do for you in the way of a dream, so that you may know how All Fairies' is kept. White magic is not much talked about, but it has its uses."

So Philomène slept, and in her dream she saw a wide, waste bog land, studded with numberless little pools, each a round, bright mirror framed in rushes, large enough to bathe the reflection of just one star, so that the bog was called the Bog of Stars. The fairies had already begun to assemble; elves and goblins, leprechauns, kobolds and dwarfs. There were so many little men dressed in green, and so many elves in cocoon silk, that from a distance Philomène failed to distinguish the twin sisters or Sweet William, but she recognised Master Mustardseed in his bright yellow coat, with a moss green cap upon his curls, for he, with Moth and Cobweb and Peasblossom, surrounded the fairy queen.

"How glad I am," thought Philomène,

" that they have allowed him to go back to Fairyland just for to-night. I am sure he would have hated to spend Samhain all by himself in his cage."

In her dream he nodded to her, and she nodded back and smiled. At first the fairies danced, and mystic, fantastic dances they were ; Philomène tried to follow their mazes till her eyes ached, so rapidly, so airily, did the groups dissolve and re-unite and dissolve again. And all the while sweet joypeals chimed from unseen foxglove bells. But when the moon was near its setting, a herald blew upon a trumpet-daffodil, and after that there was silence, and Puck was bidden by the queen to read out the roll of the names of those who still kept their faith in the fairies.

" The number lessens," said Oberon, " but there is still a goodly company left, and we have many secret believers."

Then Puck began to read ; name after name, name after name. Philomène was already growing confused and wearied when her own name rang out, clear and unexpected, " Philomène Isolde."

She sat up in bed, dazed and wondering, but no one had called her. The firelight was playing

upon Joan of Arc's picture, and the red glare brightened and broadened among the branches of the oak-tree. Queen Mab lay curled up at the foot of the bed, but she seemed to be fast asleep, so Philomène turned on her side and fell fast asleep also, and this time her sleep was deep and sound, and uncoloured by dreams.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH THE HEROINE MAKES FRIENDS WITH A SPIRIT

"NURSIE, do you believe in ghosts?" This question was put by Philomène as she sat at her dressing-table on the evening of the last of October, while Nurse brushed out her hair. She was almost well again now, though not quite.

"There are ghosts and ghosts, you know, Miss," replied Nurse decidedly. "I don't hold with modern ghosts myself, your pencils and tumblers and noises made by tables. But in the house where I first went into service there was a most undoubted ghost. He was of the good old-fashioned sort, and pulled your bed-clothes right off you. There was no mistaking him."

When Nurse had left her, Philomène stood for a moment irresolute in the middle of the room. "I will say some prayers first of all," she reflected, "and then——"

The prayers did not take long. From the

"BY HER BEDSIDE THERE STOOD A SMALL FIGURE"

tower of a church near by came a rushing sound of bells, and Philomène went and knelt on the chair by the window. It was a wild night, and she was afraid to push up the sash lest she should catch cold, in spite of her warm red dressing-gown and slippers, but she pressed her face close to the glass, and listened with strained attention. Fitfully upon the gusts of wind the fragmentary music reached her, rising and falling with the gale. The beautiful mellow-throated chimes seemed to be sending some message through the storm, to be ringing out some good news across the mighty, toil-worn, unheeding city that lay beneath them. At one time Philomène fancied that she could almost make out the words: "O ye spirits and souls of the righteous, bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him for ever!"

"I think if the White Létiche came now," she thought, "I should not mind."

Timidly she looked behind her. By her bedside there stood a small figure, bright-haired and all in white; it was leaning against the bed-post, and the little, transparent hand rested upon the burnished brass knob at the top. Philomène got down from the chair and approached it softly. The White Létiche turned,

and looked at her with eyes as blue as a mid-summer sea; they were not merry eyes, but there were happy lights in them, as when the sea mirrors blue heaven.

"I hope you noticed that I sang, 'I'm sitting on the stile, Mary,' while I undressed," said Philomène, rather shyly, remembering that Queen Mab had told her to set the conversation going. "I once read somewhere that it was the kind thing to do on All Souls' Eve, to sing or whistle, so that the souls who are hurrying to keep their feast need not brush up against one on their way, which is supposed to hurt them. I didn't ask Nurse to do it too, because she can't sing, only in church."

"It was good of you to think of it," said the White Létiche smiling, "though indeed many is the time you have brushed past me in this room without its hurting me."

Philomène was now sitting on the bed, feeling quite at her ease with her strange little companion. "And do the unchristened children really live among the water-babies?" she asked curiously. "Is it nice where you come from?"

"I can't tell you about where I come from," said the White Létiche, "it is against rules.

But I could tell you other things, things which I did not know when I slept in this room."

"What sort of things?" asked Philomène; "stories?"

"Why, yes, some of them are stories," said the White Létiche. "I wonder now would you care to hear the story of the very strangest christening that ever befell?"

"What made it so strange?" asked Philomène, eagerly; "and what was the baby's name?"

"Wait a bit," said the White Létiche.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH THE WHITE LÉTICHE TELLS HER STORY

Upon the outskirts of a village there once lived a weaver, who was very skilful at his loom, and wove many fine and beautiful stuffs, while in a wretched cabin out in the fields beyond the village dwelt a certain poor widow woman, who had to earn her livelihood by spinning. It was from her that the weaver bought his flax, but indeed he often went to the cabin when there was still a plentiful store of flax at home, in the hope of seeing the widow's only daughter.

Now the maiden was not the widow's own child, for the poor woman as she came home one evening through the fields had found a little baby lying among the stubble, and having no children of her own, she had brought it home with her and adopted it. And because she had found it under the Michaelmas moon, she had it christened Micheline.

Micheline was very beautiful, and in the spring time when the weaver would walk by her side, and watch her break a sprig of blackthorn from the hedge to place it in her hair or in the folds of her ragged green dress, it seemed to him that all the world could not hold another maid so fair as she. But she was indifferent to his suit, and this made him very sad. Also there was a mystery about her which he could not solve, for often she would disappear from home altogether, sometimes for a few days only, sometimes for months at a time, and when he questioned her foster-mother she only made excuses and gave evasive answers.

One day the weaver went into the neighbouring city to offer some of his stuffs for sale at court, and it happened that just as he entered the gateway of the palace, a gallant prince came riding forth, with a plume in his hat and a sword by his side, mounted upon a splendidly accoutred horse.

"It must be a fine thing to be a prince," thought the weaver.

Good luck befriended him, for the queen and her daughter bought all his beautiful woven stuffs, and he left the palace with his pockets

full of gold. On his way home he again saw the prince, who was watering his horse at a roadside trough.

"Are you not the poor weaver who trudged past me under the palace gateway but an hour ago?" asked the prince.

"I was poor enough then," replied the weaver, "but I am rich now, for the queen and the princess her daughter were graciously pleased to buy my whole store of stuffs."

"Then you had better fortune than I," returned the prince, "for I have been courting the princess this year and more, but she will have none of me. She is so cold and listless that she cares for no man's addresses."

"Alas, we are then brothers in misfortune," quoth the weaver, "for I too love a maid who does not love me in return." And with that they parted, and the weaver went home, only to find that Micheline had once more disappeared, he knew not whither. But the prince mounted his good steed and rode forth into the world, to seek adventures and forget his sorrow.

He soon came to a dense wood, and when night fell, seeing a great castle before him, he knocked at the gates and asked for shelter. Now in this castle lived a mighty magician,

who received the prince with all hospitality, and bade him sit down with him to supper. But as the prince sat at table, he often turned his head and listened intently, for it seemed to him that ever and anon he caught a sound like the ticking of innumerable clocks.

"What may that be?" he asked at length.

"It is the beating of many hearts," replied the magician, "for I have the hearts of all men in my keeping."

"Is the cold, proud heart of my dear princess amongst them?" asked the prince.

"Most certainly," said the magician, "and if you would know what is her heart's desire, you need only go and see wherein her heart lies."

"I go upon the instant!" cried the prince, starting to his feet. Then he entered a great hall adjoining, and there he found the hearts of all men, each beating in its own chosen place. Some lay within coffers of gold, some upon altars, others between the leaves of a book, others again were half smothered beneath a pile of fripperies and tinsel. But the heart of his princess lay within a certain gold crown of strange workmanship.

As soon as he had caught sight of it, the

prince drew his sword with its jewelled cross-hilt, and waving it above his head, he cried: "Though I should first have to conquer all the kingdoms of the world, I will win that crown for my lady, no matter whose it be. And then perhaps her heart will turn to me, and she will love me."

The next day he set forth upon his quest, but as he rode out of the castle gates, he remembered the weaver who was a lover like himself, and meeting a doe in the forest, he said to her: "Run swiftly, pretty doe, and carry a message to my brother the weaver. Tell him of this castle, that he too may come, and learn what it is on which his lady has set her heart."

So the fleet-flooted doe ran till she reached a brook, where she stooped to drink. "O brook," said she, "hidden in a thicket I have a baby fawn, and I dare not leave it long alone. Bear you the prince's message to the weaver."

So the brook took the message, and flowed on through the forest till it became choked with sedges. "O dragonfly," it said in a stifled voice to a dragonfly that hovered among the flags, "bear you the prince's message to the weaver."

Then the dragonfly flew to the weaver's house, and gave him the prince's message, and that same day the weaver set out. But when he had reached the castle, and had sought for the heart of Micheline among the rest, he could not find it.

"Since that is so, it means that she is not a mortal," said the magician, "you must go seek for her in Fairyland."

"I pray you tell me the way," said the weaver.

"That I cannot do," the magician made answer, "each must find the way to Fairyland for himself."

Then the weaver set forth upon his travels, and sought Micheline at every fairy ring and haunted pool, by cairn and by waterfall, but nowhere could he find her. At last one day as he went along the road feeling much disheartened, he thought he recognised the rich trappings of a horse that was cropping the grass by the roadside, and the next moment he caught sight of the prince standing near by.

"Fortune has again brought us together, friend," said the prince, "therefore let us continue our journey in each other's company."

And as they went along they told one

another all their adventures. The prince too had been in many lands, but his quest had led him into courts and palaces, where he had been sumptuously feasted; kings and queens had put on their crowns in his honour, but that one crown of strange workmanship he had nowhere found. Presently the two travellers reached the entrance of a narrow, gloomy gorge.

"Let us press on," counselled the prince, "it may be that on the other side we shall find some shelter for the night, for already it grows dusk."

But no sooner had they entered the gorge, with steep hillsides to either hand, than the prince's steed took fright, and reared and threw his rider, and galloped madly back by the way they had come.

"What can have startled the horse?" cried the prince, as he sprang up unhurt.

"Hush," said the weaver, "listen." Then, as they stood and listened, a sound of laughter and revelry reached them from within the hillside to their right.

"We have found the way into Fairyland," cried the weaver, "and I must go and seek Micheline among her own people."

"Be wary, friend," cautioned the prince, "for if I am not mistaken the hill fairies have a bad reputation, and have worked harm to wayfarers before now."

But the weaver would not be dissuaded. "How shall we enter, prince?" he cried, on fire with impatience.

Then the prince drew his sword, and smote the hillside, so that it cleft asunder by reason of the cross-shaped hilt, and together they entered a hall dim and vasty, where the hill fairies were holding their revels. The elfin king the while sat moodily watching the dance, but upon the entry of the strangers he descended the steps of his throne and came forward to greet them. The weaver then saw that his eyes were treacherous and cruel, but the prince saw only that upon his head he wore the crown that was the desire of his lady's heart. The king placed them on either side of his throne, and made them welcome.

"Tell me, I beg of you," said the weaver, impatient of delay, "is there at your court a maid of the name of Micheline?"

"The maid is indeed at my court," replied the king, "though among us she goes by another name."

"How came I then to meet her among mortals?" asked the weaver.

Then the king made answer: "The widow who is now her fostermother found her among the stubble under the harvest moon, and the next night she heard a tapping at her window, and went, and saw a fairy nurse standing by the sill. 'Give me back my child,' said the fairy nurse, 'the child whom I laid to sleep among the stubble.' 'That will I not,' quoth the widow woman, 'for she is mine now, and I have had her christened like one of ourselves.' 'I love her too well to take her against her will,' answered the fairy nurse, 'in years to come she shall choose between us.' 'I love her too well to keep her against her will,' said the widow woman, 'so it shall be as you say.' Thus it happens that the maid is sometimes with us, and sometimes with her fostermother."

Then the weaver turned and saw a troop of fairies coming towards him, and Micheline was of the number, fair as ever in her dress of green, with a blackthorn wreath in her hair. Forthwith he sprang to meet her and caught her in his arms, and at once was whirled away into the midst of the dance. But all this time the prince

sat silent and thoughtful, pondering by what means he might obtain possession of the elfin crown.

Louder and louder grew the bursts of song, madder and madder reeled the dance. The weaver's senses swam, his feet seemed to become leaden, and the sweat stood out upon his forehead. The fairies pressed hard upon him, and strange evil faces peered into his, like the faces of ape and wild cat, bear, and bat and viper. Now as the rout swayed backwards and forwards before the steps of the throne, the prince awoke from his musing, and caught sight of the weaver, who with blanched face and disshevelled hair was stretching out his hands in a prayer for help. Then the prince started to his feet, and with a cry drew his sword from its sheath. The fairies fell back before the cross-shaped hilt, and the elfin king himself quailed upon his throne. Micheline alone stood her ground.

"Little care I for your holy sign," quoth she, "have I not been christened even as you?" So saying she stepped forward, and touching the prince and the weaver upon brow and breast, she turned them both into nightingales.

"So shall you remain," said she, "until I

die." And with that she burst out laughing, knowing that fairies are immortal. Then the nightingales took wing and flew away out of the cleft in the hillside by which they had entered.

"It seems we are still to be brothers in misfortune," said the prince, "let us therefore remain together, good friend."

"With all my heart, prince," replied the weaver. "Whither shall we go?"

"Let us go to the palace garden," said the prince, "so that I may sing my sweetest beneath my lady's window."

So day after day they flew over mountain and valley, till they reached the city where the princess lived, and that same night as she leant forth from her casement, she heard two nightingales singing, more sweetly and more sorrowfully than any hitherto. The weaver sang of his lost love, and the prince made known to her all the toil and peril he had suffered for her sake.

"Ah me, poor prince, would that I might disenchant you!" said she.

"Your love would disenchant me!" cried cried the prince.

"Not so," the princess made answer,

"remember the fairy's curse. Alas, it was just on such a night as this that I stood at my window and watched the fairies making merry on the greenward. Then it was that the desire took hold of me to become queen of their revels, so that I too might wear the blackthorn and the fatal green, and till that desire is laid to rest there is no room in my thoughts for love. I know no peace of mind through the longing that I have for the elfin crown, and it may be that I also am enchanted, even as you." So saying she wept bitterly, and the nightingales hushed their singing for very sorrow.

Now the next night the princess could not sleep for thought of the crown, so she went down into the dewy, dusky garden, and wandered in and out among the flowers. She was all in white, with a jewelled dagger in her hair, and as the prince watched her, his heart nearly broke for love of her beauty.

All at once the trumpets of the honeysuckle blew a blast, and over the greensward the fairies came trooping, with the elfin king and his train in their midst. For a while the princess stood apart, sadly and silently watching the revelry, but at last she stepped forward

with clasped hands and beseeching eyes, and, as it chanced, it was to Micheline that she spoke: "I pray you, sweet fay, teach me to dance as beautifully as yourself."

"And if I do," said Micheline, "will you give me in exchange the precious thing that sparkles so royally in your hair?"

"That will I gladly," quoth the princess, and she drew forth the jewelled dagger, and gave it to the fairy. "Only see that you handle it carefully," said she, "for it carries death at its point, for all it is so bright and beautiful."

"Death!" laughed Micheline, "we fairies have no fear of death. See, it will do me no hurt!" And so saying she stabbed herself in reckless frolic. But as she did so she grew white to the lips, and sank upon her knees.

"Ah, the waters of my baptism!" she cried out, "they have stolen my immortality from me!" And she fell lifeless to the ground.

At that the spell was broken, and the prince and the weaver resumed their proper shapes. Then once more the prince's sword flashed from out its sheath.

"I have nothing to fear from the rest of you!" he cried, "therefore now, O fairy king,

yield up your crown, for my lady will know no rest till it is hers ! "

Then the king stepped forward, smiling strangely, and set his crown upon the brow of the princess. But even as he did so it turned all to withered leaves, which lightly kissed her waving hair and then fluttered to the ground.

" See, my beloved," said the prince, " this fairy gold is not for us. At the touch of a mortal it decays, therefore cease from your desire."

" It was but an idle dream," said she, " love is the better diadem."

Then they turned and looked again upon the greensward, but the king and his court were gone, and from far away, borne to them fitfully upon the nightwind, there came a sound which none had ever heard before, of fairies keening their dead.

Now that same night, when the fields lay grey in the moonlight, and the shadows were long between the haycocks, the widow woman sat in her lonely cabin, and it seemed to her that she heard a tapping at the window. So she went and looked, and there stood the fairy nurse beside the sill.

"Micheline is dead," said she, "and will return no more, neither to you nor to me. Go back to your spinning and forget her." So saying she moved away, and passed in and out among the haycocks till she was lost to sight.

But the prince and princess were married, and in the course of time they became king and queen and reigned long and prosperously. As for the weaver, he was made court weaver, and remained the prince's friend all his days."

Philomène drew a deep breath. "Well, I am sure I like you ever so much better than Micheline," said she, "though Micheline was christened and you weren't. Oh, I wonder will you be able to tell me another story next All Souls' Eve, you dear little White Létiche?"

"I wonder," replied the White Létiche, thoughtfully.

"And I shall not see you till then?"

"No, we do not show ourselves. And now good night."

Then the White Létiche kissed her frail little hand to Philomène. "Shut your eyes," she said softly, "you did not see me come, and you must not see me go." And when Philomène

again opened her eyes she was alone in the room.

The gale rattled at the window, and the curtains waved in the gust; the night was stormy, and the bells were silent. Philomène hurriedly took off her dressing-gown and slippers, and crept into bed.

"After all," she thought as she dropped asleep, "I don't think it can matter such a lot about being christened; the holy Innocents couldn't possibly have been christened, not a single one of them, and yet I know they have got a collect all to themselves."

CHAPTER XXII

WHICH HERALDS A CHANGE

"DADDY is calling me, Nurse. Do remember to take the price off the herald angels, and the cornflower calendar with the ten commandments on it will go for a halfpenny. I thought the commandments might make it over-weight, but they don't. Coming, Daddy!" It was the afternoon of Christmas Eve; Philomène was busy with all sorts of cards and parcels, and later on she was to go to her godmother's for tea and presents and a Christmas tree.

Her father was waiting for her in the study. He took her on his knee, and stroked her hair for a little while before speaking. Then he said tenderly; "I have not been a very good Daddy to you these last few months, little maid, and I am sorry, and I want to explain."

Philomène opened her eyes wide. "You know, little Miss Muffet," continued her father

gently, "if one cares very, very much, ever so much, for someone, and doesn't know if that someone cares back, it makes one very unhappy."

"But why don't you ask and find out, right away?" said Philomène.

"I have asked, and I have found out, but it took me a long time to make up my mind, and meanwhile I was so much worried that I'm afraid I was often cross to my little girl. Has she forgiven me, I wonder?"

Philomène hid her face. "Oh, Daddy," she whispered, "don't talk so; it doesn't sound quite proper, somehow, for you to put it that way round."

The doctor laughed. "My dear," he said, "if it sometimes occurred to parents that their children might possibly have something to forgive in them, they would have a good deal less to forgive in their children."

He gave her a fond kiss, and she flung her arms round him, declaring that he was the best Daddy in the world, and got down from his knee. Not long afterwards he was standing in Isolde's boudoir, holding both her hands in his.

"I have loved you," she was saying slowly, "ever since I first met you."

"And did Rachel know?"

"No, it was the only secret I had from her."

"I waited," said the doctor, "I waited, dear, because I was a coward. Two things held me back. Your riches, for I found it hard to take so much from any woman, and my fear lest you should think that it was only for the child's sake, just because I could not bear to see her motherless any longer."

She looked at him wistfully, knowing that what he had given to his first wife he could not give again, but she knew also that his love for her was deep and true. She smiled at him, and was about to answer when Philomène's voice was heard outside.

"You had better go now," said Isolde hastily, "I would rather be alone with her when I tell her."

In another moment Philomène had entered. The cold wind had heightened her colour, and her hazel eyes shone with eager expectation. "O, Godmother," she exclaimed, running up to Isolde, "I have been thinking all to-day how very, very sorry one ought to feel for the poor people in the Old Testament who never had any Christmases. I do so wonder how they got on without them."

"I daresay they had a great many more birthdays than we have, little cushat," Isolde replied merrily, "you see, they are supposed to have lived so very very long. Only think how many birthdays Methuselah must have had, and they would more than make up for the Christmas presents he didn't get!"

"I suppose so," said Philomène, thoughtfully, "and of course they had the Passover; not that they got anything then, except dull roast lamb and parsley, but at least it must have been rather fun striking the hyssop on to the door lintels."

The Christmas tree was standing in the bow-window, decorated with fir cones and lighted candles, and below it was a little crèche, with the Madonna and the Christchild, and the ox and ass standing by the manger. Beside it was a table, on which Philomène's Christmas presents had been spread, and it was when these had been looked at and admired, that Isolde sat down on the floor close to the crèche, and drew Philomène towards her.

"Little cushat," said she, "on this night, of all nights in the year, when we are thinking of the best and dearest mother that ever was or will be, I want to tell you that Daddy has

asked me to be your mother. Are you a little bit glad ? "

Philomène was very glad, too glad to speak at first. Then a shadow fell. " Godmother," she whispered, " there is just one thing I should like to say, but I'm afraid it may hurt you. I was thinking that you would want me to call you " Mother," as though I were really your own little girl, and I wish I were, or at least I wish I had been to start with, because you know how I love you, Godmother dear, and I should have been ever so glad if you had been my real mother properly from the beginning. But you aren't, you see, and it seems to me it would be better not to call you ' Mother,' nor to make-believe, but to go on calling you Godmother just as I used to do, and to keep ' Mother ' for when I meet my own mother later on. Don't you think she might feel a little bit sorry and left out if I had used up that name for someone else, even for you ? "

" You are right," said Isolde in a very low voice, " we will not defraud the dead."

The next day Philomène went to announce the news to Sweet William. She sat opposite to him on the toadstool which she had come to consider her own, with her elbows propped

on the mushroom table between them, as she had sat many and many a time during the past year.

"I quite see that it cannot be helped," said Sweet William, when she had finished speaking, "but I am sorry."

A startled look came into Philomene's eyes. "What do you mean?" she asked uneasily, "why should you be sorry?"

"For one thing, you will not live at Sideview any longer," replied Sweet William, gravely. This had not yet occurred to Philomène, and now that she realised it she put her head down on the mushroom, and cried bitterly.

"Oh, and I used to think it such a dull little house," she sobbed, "and now I shall be ever so sorry to leave it. I have found a fairy in the garden, and another indoors, and a witch and a White Létiche as well, such a dear, pretty little White Létiche. Are the fairies going to leave me, Sweet William, all because Daddy wants to marry again?"

"You are not putting the matter quite fairly," replied Sweet William, with a momentary return of his severest manner, "it is not your father's marriage in itself which will oblige us to leave you for the present, or rather, you

to leave us. It is that the Good People are only the comrades of lonely children, and now you will not be lonely any more. Your godmother will make you a good mother, and a good friend, and you will need us no longer. Remember, Griselda never went up into the cuckoo clock again after she had found a playmate."

"But even if I have to leave you behind me," said Philomène, fighting with her tears, "I shall have Master Mustardseed and Queen Mab with me still, and Speedwell and Spirea live at the Cushats."

Sweet William shook his head. "That makes no difference," he said, "you will still have a canary and a cat, but not a fairy and a white witch. I daresay you may catch a glimpse of the twins now and then when it is growing dusk, but it will be of no use trying to get them to speak to you, unless they make the first move. Of course I don't for a moment say that you and I will never meet again; I may very possibly turn up years hence in some other garden. After all, you had the green ribbons on your christening robe, and that will always count for something."

Philomène dried her tears, but she was far

from feeling comforted. She looked sadly all round the little room, and had hard work to prevent them from flowing afresh as she wished Sweet William good-bye. She was half way down the garden path before she remembered that she had left her latchkey sticking in the lock. She went back at once, but it was gone.

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